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**Touching the Void:**  
**The museological implications of theft on public art collections**

**Jillian Seaton**

**Ph.D.**  
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## Abstract

Of central importance to this thesis is the way security measures contradict the process through which museums have been seeking to divest themselves of theoretical hierarchies and value judgments in recent years. A context for investigation is established that considers how a perceptible increase in art theft, complicated by the escalating value of individual objects and the proliferation of museums as represented by a rise in attendance figures has produced a climate of vulnerability for arts collections around the world. In response, museums are installing unprecedented levels of security that are having a significant impact on established viewing conditions and redefining museum space. Further hindering this situation is the disparity between the fields of museology and museum security. These two fields have grown simultaneously, yet independently of one another producing a significant paradox between museum rhetoric and practice. To address the disconnection, this thesis seeks to make museum security relevant to academic discourse by aligning features related to the safeguarding of collections with contemporary museological considerations.

Taking the void left behind by a stolen object as a point of departure, this thesis examines the ways in which theft alters the relationship between viewer, object and space in the museum setting. Three major case studies each form a chapter exploring the impact of the theft on established viewing conditions. As the first art theft of the modern era, the theft of the *Mona Lisa* from the Louvre, Paris (1911) creates an historic precedence for this investigation allowing for the examination of how conventions based upon exclusivity were dismantled by the theft, only to be reproduced by a legacy of increasingly prohibitive security measures. The theft of thirteen objects from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston (1990) is used to address the implications of theft on a fixed and introspective collection, and in particular upon institutional identity and public memory. The theft of the *Scream* and *Madonna* from the Munch Museum, Oslo (2004) and its subsequent security upgrade reveal a negation of institutional transparency and the birth of a new security aesthetic. An analysis of each space is balanced against material gathered from a variety of visual, textual and ephemeral sources to produce a developed understanding of affected space.

I confirm that this thesis is my own work and that it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.



*For My Boys*  
Thank you.

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## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Declaration of Own Work.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Table of Contents.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>List of Illustrations.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Chapter 1      Introduction.....</b>	<b>23</b>
Methodology	
Literature Review	
I.      Museological Literature	
II.     Museum Security Literature	
III.    Art Theft Literature	
The Vulnerability of Public Art Collections	
I.      Increasing Value of Individual Objects	
II.     Increase in Museum Attendance	
III.    Increase in Art Theft	
<b>Chapter 2      Louvre, Paris.....</b>	<b>89</b>
Source Material	
Literature	
From Museum to Crime Scene: Urban criminality at the Louvre	
Empty Space: The exhibition of art theft and the dismantling of convention	
Mass print culture and the interrogation of museum practice	
Irreverent parody of the theft	
The theft and popular crime narratives	
The theft and local anxieties: American conspiracy theories	
Curating the empty space: difficulties of display	

## Security as a Reproduction of Institutional Hierarchies

- I. Display of the *Mona Lisa* 1516 – 1911
- II. Recovery of the *Mona Lisa*: 1913
- III. Post-theft critical reception of the *Mona Lisa*
- IV. The security of the *Mona Lisa* during World Wars I and II
- V. The *Mona Lisa* Abroad: 1962-63 and 1974
- VI. The *Mona Lisa* today

## Conclusion

## **Chapter 3 Munch Museum, Oslo.....183**

Methodology and source material

Anxiety and Architecture: The history of the Munch Museum

The Original Display of the Collection: Informing Principles

Theft of *The Scream* and *Madonna*: 22 August 2004

Fortress Munch: Security Upgrade 2004 – 2005

- I. Accessibility
- II. Display
- III. Recovery of *The Scream* and *Madonna*: 31 August 2006

## Conclusion

## **Chapter 4 Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston.....217**

Methodology and source material

Isabella Stewart Gardner's Fenway Court: Taste and sentiment

Security and public access at the Gardner Museum in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century

A Fixed and Introspective Collection

The Theft, 18 March 1990

Post-theft Implications for the Gardner Museum: The first wave

Post-theft Implications for the Gardner Museum: The second wave

The New Gardner Museum

	Conclusion	
<b>Chapter 5</b>	<b>Conclusion</b> .....	267
	Historical Tension within Museums	
	Museological Responses to Threats are Varied	
	Armed Robbery	
	New Security Aesthetic	
	Going Forward	
	<b>Bibliography</b> .....	277
	<b>Illustrations</b> .....	295
<b>Tables</b>	<b>Appendix 1: Databases of Stolen Objects</b> .....	383

## **List of Illustrations and Tables**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Fig. 1.1 Mrs. Vanderbilt's bedroom, Vanderbilt Mansion, Hyde Park, New York.

Fig. 1.2 Exhibition photograph of *The Book of Kells: Treasures of Trinity College Dublin*, Royal Academy, London, 1961.

Fig. 1.3 Cover of *Time Magazine*, 24 November 1961.

Fig. 1.4 Visitors during the 34 hour-long viewing of *Monet in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* exhibition, Royal Academy, London, April 1999.

Fig. 1.5 A table produced by the Art Loss Register organising reported thefts by location as of 2008. Maneker, Marion. 23 April 2009. 'Art Loss Register Data Dump', *Art Market Monitor*. <http://artmarketmonitor.com/2009/04/23/art-loss-register-data-dump>.

Fig. 1.6 A table produced by the Art Loss Register illustrating items listed on its database by category as of 2008. Maneker, Marion. 23 April 2009. 'Art Loss Register Data Dump', *Art Market Monitor*. <http://artmarketmonitor.com/2009/04/23/art-loss-register-data-dump>.

### **Chapter 2: Louvre, Paris**

Fig. 2.1 Louis Béroud, *Mona Lisa au Louvre*, 1911.

Fig. 2.2 Empty Space on wall in the Salon Carré, Louvre, Paris. Published in *L'Illustration*, 2 September 1911.

Fig. 2.3 Crowds gathering at the Louvre, *L'Intransigeant*, 24 August 1911.

Fig. 2.4 Frontispiece to Alphonse Bertillon. 1893. *Identification anthropométrique* (Melun, Imprimerie Administrative).

Fig. 2.5 Photograph of a class on the Bertillon method of criminal identification, 'Speaking Portraits', 1911.

Fig. 2.6 Image of the Salon Carré published in *Le Petit Parisien*, 23 August 1911. A white 'x' is marked under the *Mona Lisa*.

Fig. 2.7 Postcard of the Salon Carré, Louvre, c.1910.

Fig. 2.8 Crudely-drawn floor plan of the Louvre published in *Le Petit Parisien*, 23 August 1911.

Fig. 2.9 Presumed escape route of the thief published in *L'Illustration*, 2 September 1911.

Fig. 2.10 Cover page, 'The Apaches are the plague of Paris', *Le Petit Journal*, 20 October 1907.

Fig. 2.11 Cover page, 'Prison does not scare the Apaches', *Le Petit Journal*, 19 July 1908.

Fig. 2.12 An 'Apache revolver' (multipurpose pin fire revolver) manufactured by L. Dolne à Liege, 1869.

Fig. 2.13 Reconstruction of the *coup du père François*, published in a French self-defence manual, c.1900.

Fig. 2.14 Nicolas Poussin, *L'Hiver* or *Le Déluge*, 1660-1664, Louvre, Paris

Fig. 2.15 Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Pope Pius VII in the Sistine Chapel*, 1814. Now in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Fig. 2.16 François-Auguste Biard, *Closing Time*, 1847.

Fig. 2.17 The exhibition of the empty space at the Louvre. Published in *Le Petit Parisien*, 30 August 1911.

Fig. 2.18 Guillaume Apollinaire arrested for the theft of the *Mona Lisa*; handcuffed and escorted by a policeman, 1911.

Fig. 2.19 Louvre guard dogs, Jack and Milord, published in *Le Petit Parisien*, 18 September 1911.

Fig. 2.20 François-Auguste Biard, *Four o'clock at the Salon*, 1847.

Fig. 2.21 Studio of Jacques Louis David, *Portrait of Old Fuzelier, Attendant at the Louvre*, c.1805, Louvre, Paris.

Fig. 2.22 Louis Béroud, *A Guard at the Louvre*, 1912.

Fig. 2.23 Croumolle receiving telegram with news of the theft, film still from *Nick Winter et le vol de la Joconde*, screened at the Omnia Pathé, Paris, 1911. Directed by Paul Garbagni and Gérard Bourgeois.

Fig. 2.24 Thief returning the *Mona Lisa*, film still from *Nick Winter et le vol de la Joconde*, screened at the Omnia Pathé, Paris, 1911. Directed by Paul Garbagni and Gérard Bourgeois.

Fig. 2.25 Sheet music by Antonin Louis for ‘La “Joconde” en vadrouille’ (*Mona Lisa on a spree*), c.1911.

Fig. 2.26 A street singer selling copies of ‘L’As-Tu Vue? La Joconde!!’ and a man selling *Mona Lisa* postcards, 1911.

Fig. 2.27 Street Vendors in Paris, selling postcards of the *Mona Lisa*, c.1911.

Fig. 2.28 Postcard of the *Mona Lisa*, c.1911, with caption marking its disappearance from the Louvre on 21 August 1911.

Fig. 2.29 Postcard of the *Mona Lisa* (who appears when postcard is held against the heat of a flame) with St. Anthony, 1911.

Fig. 2.30 Postcard of the *Mona Lisa* (‘Maybe the rats took her’), 1911.

Fig. 2.31 Postcard of the *Mona Lisa* thumbing her nose, c. 1911.

Fig. 2.32 Postcard of the *Mona Lisa* in Egypt with Arsène Lupin, c.1912.

Fig. 2.33 Postcard of the *Mona Lisa* in London, c.1912.

Fig. 2.34 Postcard of the *Mona Lisa* on the Tour de France, c.1912.

Fig. 2.35 Postcard of the *Mona Lisa* on a donkey in Paris, c.1912.

Fig. 2.36 Gino Starace, cover for the first volume of *Fantômas*, 1911. (Collection:

Société des Amis de Fantômas, Paris).

Fig. 2.37 Juan Gris, *Fantômas (Pipe and Newspaper)*, 1915, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

Fig. 2.38 Portrait of Maurice Leblanc in *Je Sais Tout*, 15 October 1908.

Fig. 2.39 Sketch of *Arsène Lupin*, directed by Francis de Croisset and Maurice Leblanc. Four-act play first performed on October 28, 1908, at the Athénée in Paris.

Fig. 2.40 *Arsène Lupin* (film), 1932, directed by Jack Conway, released by Merto-Goldwyn-Mayer, 84 min.

Fig. 2.41. Reproduction of the *Mona Lisa* hung in the empty space.

Fig. 2.42 *Carnaval de Nice : char "Au revoir par la Joconde"*, 11 February 1912.

Fig. 2.43 *Carnaval de Nice, les bandits de Pégomas emportant la Joconde*, 11 February 1912.

Fig. 2.44 Raffaello Santi (Raphael), Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione, c. 1514-15, Louvre, Paris.

Fig. 2.45 Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, *La Femme à la perle*, 1842. Louvre, Paris.

Fig. 2.46 Hubert Robert, *Design for the Grande Galerie in the Louvre*, 1796. Musée Louvre, Paris.

Fig. 2.47 Samuel F.B. Morse, *The Gallery of the Louvre*, 1833, Musée américain, Giverny.

Fig. 2.48 Giuseppe Castiglione, *Vue du Salon Carré au Musée du Louvre*, 1861.

Fig. 2.49 Louis Béroud, *Portrait of Frédéric La Guillerme, engraving the Mona Lisa*, 1909.

Fig. 2.50 The *Mona Lisa* at the Uffizi, Florence, December 1913. Museum Director Giovanni Poggi (right) inspects the painting.

Fig. 2.51 The *Mona Lisa* on display at the Uffizi, Florence, 14 – 19 December 1913.



Fig. 2.52 Crowds outside the Borghese Gallery, Rome, December 1913.

Fig. 2.53 Yves Polli, Postcard marking the arrival of the *Mona Lisa* in Milan, 1913-14.

Fig. 2.54 Yves Polli, Postcard of the *Mona Lisa* being driven by Leonardo back to Paris, 1913-14.

Fig. 2.55 The *Mona Lisa* on display at the École des Beaux Arts, Paris, 31 December 1913 to 3 January 1914. Photograph published in “*La Joconde*” a réintégré son domicile légal’, *Le Petit Parisien*, 4 January 1914.

Fig. 2.56 Special entrance for visitors to see the *Mona Lisa* in January 1914, Louvre, Paris. Photograph published in ‘Au Louvre, les Parisiens ont defilé devant la “Joconde”’, *Le Petit Parisien*, 5 January 1914.

Fig. 2.57 Above: *Mona Lisa* at the Salon Carré, Louvre (pre-theft photograph). Below: a diagram of the Salon Carré, showing the flow of traffic between the two barriers erected for the exhibition following its recovery. Photograph and diagram published in ‘*La “Joconde” a réintégré son domicile légal*’, *Le Petit Parisien*, 4 January 1914.

Fig. 2.58 William Nicholson, *The Return of the Mona Lisa*, 1914. Private Collection.

Fig. 2.59 *Mona Lisa* at the Louvre, 1929.

Fig. 2.60 Return of the *Mona Lisa* to the Louvre after the war. Paris, 1945.

Fig. 2.61 *Mona Lisa* hanging in the Louvre. Photographed by Dmitri Kessel, *LIFE*, 1950.

Fig. 2.62 Faith Ringgold, *Dancing at the Louvre*, 1991. Acrylic on canvas, tie-dyed, pieced fabric border, 73.5 x 80 inches. From the series *The French Collection Part I*; Number 1. Private Collection.

Fig. 2.63 The crated *Mona Lisa* in the stateroom of the SS *France*, en route to New York, December 1962.

Fig. 2.64 The transfer of the *Mona Lisa* from the SS *France* to a security van in New

York Harbor at Pier 88 under the watch of New York City police officers, December 19, 1962.

Fig. 2.65 Members of the press viewing the *Mona Lisa* in the vault of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Fig. 2.66 Posing with the *Mona Lisa* at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. L-R: President John F. Kennedy, Madame Marie-Madeleine Lioux (wife of André Malraux), French Culture Minister André Malraux, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, and Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson.

Fig. 2.67 The *Mona Lisa*, behind glass, guarded by two U.S. Marine Corps guards with fixed bayonets at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., January 1963.

Fig. 2.68 Children viewing the *Mona Lisa* at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., January 14, 1963.

Fig. 2.69 Visitors queuing to see the *Mona Lisa* at the National Gallery, Washington, D.C., 13 January 1963.

Fig. 2.70 Queue for the *Mona Lisa* exhibition stretching down Fifth Avenue at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Fig. 2.71 Visitors view the *Mona Lisa* in the Medieval Sculpture Hall at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Fig. 2.72 Souvenirs of the *Mona Lisa*'s exhibition in Tokyo, 1974.

Fig. 2.73 *Mona Lisa* as a consumer icon. Tokyo, 1974.

Fig. 2.74 Exhibition of the *Mona Lisa* at the Tokyo National Museum, 17 April to 11 June 1974.

Fig. 2.75 Exhibition of the *Mona Lisa* at the Tokyo National Museum, 17 April to 11 June 1974.

Fig. 2.76 *The Pavilion of the Vatican, New York World's Fair*, Flushing Meadows, Queens, New York, Manhattan Postcard Company, Chrome, 9 x 14cm.

Fig. 2.77 Three-tiered moving sidewalk at the Vatican Pavilion, World's Fair, New

York, 1964.

Fig. 2.78 The *Mona Lisa* was transferred to the Salle Rosa while the Salle des États was refurbished from 2001-2005.

Fig. 2.79 The specially-constructed enclosure of the *Mona Lisa* in the Salle des États, until 2001.

Fig. 2.80 Another view of the *Mona Lisa* in the Salle États, 1998.

Fig. 2.81 The *Mona Lisa* in the Salle des États, 2005.

Fig. 2.82 The freestanding wall of the *Mona Lisa* in the Salle des États, 2005.

Fig. 2.83 Veronese's *The Wedding Feast at Cana* in the Salle des États, 2005. This painting faces the *Mona Lisa* at the opposite end of the gallery.

Fig. 2.84 The tensabarrier set beyond Piqueras's fixed wooden railing in the Salle des États.

Fig. 2.85 A sense of the distance between the tensabarrier and the fixed railing in the Salle des États.

Fig. 2.86 Overcrowding before the *Mona Lisa* in the Salle des États.

Fig. 2.87 Disabled access between the barriers to view the *Mona Lisa*.

Fig. 2.88 A spotlight is integrated into the shelf under the *Mona Lisa*.

Fig. 2.89 New roof lighting installed in the Salle des États, 2005.

### **Chapter 3: Munch Museum, Oslo**

Fig. 3.1 Basement floor plan of the Munch Museum, Oslo, 1963. Plan numbering: 1. Store; 2. Storeroom for paintings; 3. Cloakroom; 4. Bomb shelter; 5. Technical section; 6. Custodians' quarters; 7. Conservation section.

Fig. 3.2 Main Entrance, North Façade of the Munch Museum, Oslo, 1963. A small car is parked on the ring road to the right of the main entrance.

Fig. 3.3 Ground floor plan of the Munch Museum, Oslo, 1963. Plan numbering: 8. Hall; 9. Exhibition of paintings; 10. Exhibition of prints; 11. Lecture room and temporary exhibitions; 12. Garden patio; 13. Administrative offices; 14. Library; 15. Restroom; 16. Restaurant.

Fig. 3.4 Cross-section plan of the Munch Museum, Oslo, 1963.

Fig. 3.5 Storeroom for paintings, Munch Museum, Oslo, 1963.

Fig. 3.6 Storeroom for prints and drawings, Munch Museum, Oslo, 1963.

Fig. 3.7 Exhibitions rooms, Munch Museum, Oslo, 1963.

Fig. 3.8 Exhibition of prints and drawings, Munch Museum, Oslo, 1963.

Fig. 3.9 Exhibition of paintings, Munch Museum, Oslo, 1963.

Fig. 3.10 Exhibition of paintings, Munch Museum, Oslo, 1963.

Fig. 3.11 Munch Museum, Oslo, 22 August 2004. Police cordoned off the museum and began questioning the around 70 staff members and visitors who were inside the museum when the thieves entered shortly after 11am.

Fig. 3.12 Munch Museum, Oslo, 22 August 2004. Police were notified of the robbery at 11:10am.

Fig. 3.13 Munch Museum, Oslo, 22 August 2004. Markita Ogjová from the Czech Republic saw one of the robbers threaten visitors and order them to lie on the floor.

Fig. 3.14 Aftenposten's map of the route taken by thieves during the robbery, reprinted here by BBC News, '*Scream* Stolen from Norway Museum'. 22 August 2004. *BBC News*. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3588282.stm>.

Fig. 3.15 Munch Museum, Oslo, 22 August 2004. Empty space where the *Scream* hung before the theft.

Fig. 3.16 Munch Museum, Oslo, 22 August 2004. Two thieves carrying *The Scream* and *Madonna* to getaway car. The driver of the car can be seen opening the boot for the thieves to load the pictures. Photo taken by an anonymous witness.

Fig. 3.17 Munch Museum, Oslo, 22 August 2004. Thieves loading *The Scream* and *Madonna* into the getaway car. Photo taken by an anonymous witness.

Fig. 3.18 Munch Museum, Oslo, 22 August 2004. The thieves jump in the car and drive off, within 50 seconds of entering the museum. Photo by an anonymous witness.

Fig. 3.19 Police later found the getaway car, a black Audi A6 station wagon, parked on Sinsenveien, near a local tennis club.

Fig. 3.20 Pieces of the frames from *The Scream* and *Madonna* found shortly after the robbery on the Carl Berners Pass, not far from the Munch Museum.

Fig. 3.21 A discarded piece of frame found on Sarsgaten, a street near the Munch Museum

Fig. 3.22 Munch Museum, Oslo. Posters of the *Munch By Himself* exhibition flank the main entrance. The café is situated to the left of the building. There were no changes to the exterior of the building with the 2005 restructuring.

Fig. 3.23 Installation of baggage scanner at entrance to Munch Museum, 2005.

Fig. 3.24 Director Gunnar Sorensen overseeing the installation of metal detectors at the main entrance to Munch Museum, 2005.

Fig. 3.25 Bar-coded ticket to the Munch Museum (adhesive sticker). Scanning of the ticket is required to open the security doors leading into the exhibition space (below).

Fig. 3.26 Set of remote-locking double security doors leading into the exhibition space, as seen from the main entrance. Munch Museum, Oslo, 2005.

Fig. 3.27 Director Gunnar Sorensen standing on the exhibition side of the set of double security doors. Munch Museum, Oslo, 2005. Note the waist-level locking gates.

Fig. 3.28 Photo of Munch Museum Director Gunnar Sorensen and City Art Director Lise Mjøs standing in front of empty panel where *The Scream* hung before the theft.

Fig. 3.29 Exhibition space between 1994 and 2004.

Fig. 3.30 Munch Museum, Oslo, 2005. Exhibition space post 2004.

Fig. 3.31 Munch Museum, Oslo, 2005.

Fig. 3.32 Munch Museum, Oslo, 2005.

Fig. 3.33 Munch Museum, Oslo, 2005. Bullet-proof glass sheets have been placed over any unglazed or 'portable' sized works.

Fig. 3.34 National Gallery, Oslo. The *Madonna* (left) and *Scream* (second from right) hanging before the sheets of protective glass were added in October 2005.

Fig. 3.35 Protective glass over *The Scream*, 1893, National Gallery, Oslo.

Fig. 3.36 Another view of *The Scream* hanging in the National Gallery, Oslo. No other paintings are glazed (apart from *Madonna*).

Fig. 3.37 Rijksmuseum, Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam. Designed by Benthem Crouwel NACO, completed 2003.

Fig. 3.38 Glass walls at the Rijksmuseum, Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam.

Fig. 3.39 The Thomson ivories at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto in 2009.

Fig. 3.40 Image released by the Munch Museum of *The Scream* and *Madonna* following their recovery on 31 August 2006. The discolouration from a water stain is evident on *The Scream* (bottom left corner) as well as the two punctures and scratches and paint loss to the middle right edge of the *Madonna*.

Fig. 3.41 Image released by the Munch Museum of the damage to a corner of *The Scream*.

Fig. 3.42 Image released by the Munch Museum of the damage caused by a puncture to the canvas of *Madonna*.

Fig. 3.43 *The Scream* and *Madonna* on display in their damaged state, 27 September to 1 October 2006, Munch Museum, Oslo.

Fig. 3.44 *The Scream* and *Madonna* on display in their damaged state, 27 September

to 1 October 2006, Munch Museum, Oslo.

Fig. 3.45 *The Scream* and *Madonna* on display in their damaged state, 27 September to 1 October 2006, Munch Museum, Oslo.

Fig. 3.46 Long queues throughout the five-day exhibition of the newly recovered paintings from 27 September to 1 October 2006. Munch Museum, Oslo.

Fig. 3.47 *The Scream* post-conservation.

Fig. 3.48 A group of schoolchildren viewing *The Scream* after it was reinstalled behind one of the bulletproof glass walls in 2008. A matching glass wall can be seen in the background. Photo: Corrado Bonora.

#### **Chapter 4: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston**

Fig. 4.1 Johannes Vermeer, *The Concert*, 1658-1660, oil on canvas, 72.5 x 64.7 cm. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.

Fig. 4.2 Rembrandt van Rijn, *A Lady and Gentleman in Black*, 1633, oil on canvas, 131.6 x 109 cm. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.

Fig. 4.3 Rembrandt van Rijn's *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee*, 1633, oil on canvas, 161.7 x 129.8 cm. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.

Fig. 4.4 Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-Portrait*, c.1634, etching, 1 3/4 x 2 in. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.

Fig. 4.5 Édouard Manet's *Chez Tortoni*, 1878-1880, oil on canvas, 26 x 34 cm. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.

Fig. 4.6 Govaert Flinck's *Landscape with an Obelisk*, 1638, oil on oak panel, 54.5 x 71 cm. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.

Fig. 4.7 Edgar Degas, *La Sortie du Pesage*, pencil and gouache on paper, 10 x 16 cm.

Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.

Fig. 4.8 Edgar Degas, *Three Mounted Jockeys*, Black ink, white, flesh and rose washes, probably oil pigments, applied with a brush on medium brown paper, 30.5 x 24 cm. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.

Fig. 4.9 Edgar Degas, *Cortège aux Environs de Florence*, pencil and gouache on paper, 16 x 21 cm. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.

Fig. 4.10 Edgar Degas, *Program for an artistic soiree*, 1884, charcoal on white paper, 24.1 x 30.9 cm. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.

Fig. 4.11 Edgar Degas, *Program for an artistic soiree*, 1884, a lesser-finished version of the above, charcoal on buff paper, 23.4 x 30 cm. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.

Fig. 4.12 Chinese beaker or *Ku*, China, Shang Dynasty, 1200-1100BC, bronze, H. 10 1/2 in. Diam. 6 1/8 in. Wt. 2 lbs. 7 oz. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.

Fig. 4.13 Finial in the form of an eagle, gilt metal (bronze), French, 1813–1814, approximately 10 inches high. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.

Fig. 4.14 The Dutch Room at the Gardner Museum post-theft.

Fig. 4.15 The 'Black Room', 1855-57, inspired by the Early Renaissance at the Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Milan.

Fig. 4.16 Fenway Court, May 1920. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston is visible in the background. Photo: Courtesy of Boston Public Library.

Fig. 4.17 The Titian Room, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

Fig. 4.18 Entrance to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Portal contains the figures of St. George and St. Florian, patron saints protecting against theft and fire.



Fig. 4.19 The interior courtyard of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, a Venetian palace-façade turned inwards upon itself. Director Anne Hawley stands in the foreground with a visitor.

Fig. 4.20 The exterior façade of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

Fig. 4.21 The interior staircase of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum where a mixture of natural and subtle artificial lights illuminates the corridors.

Fig. 4.22 The Dutch Room, viewed from across the courtyard, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

Fig. 4.23 Reconstruction of the theft based on alarm times and eye witness accounts published by *The Boston Globe*.

Fig. 4.24 Empty frame (foreground) from which Vermeer's *The Concert* was taken during the theft.

Fig. 4.25 Empty frame from which Flinck's *Landscape with an Obelisk* was taken during the theft. The Rembrandt *Self-Portrait, Aged 23*, 1629, hanging to the left of the window was removed from the wall but left behind by the thieves.

Fig. 4.26 Empty spaces where Rembrandt's *A Lady and Gentleman in Black* (left) and *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee* (right) hung when they were cut from their frames on 18 March 1990.

Fig. 4.27 Museum attendant at the door to the Dutch Room following the theft. The empty space on the back wall is where shows where Rembrandt's *A Lady and Gentleman in Black* hung. At this time the frames had been removed for forensic examination.

Fig. 4.28 The Dutch Room before the theft, with Rembrandt's *A Lady and Gentleman in Black* hanging *in situ*.

Fig. 4.29 The label inside the frame of each missing Rembrandt notes the artist, title and date, followed by, 'Stolen on March 18, 1990'.

Fig. 4.30 Screen-shot of the old version of the website. Theft 'tab' is located on the far right of the burgundy menu, which also appeared on the home page.

Fig. 4.31 Screen-shot of the new website. Information on the theft is accessed by clicking through a few more layers: 'About', then 'Archives', then selecting 'Theft'.

Fig. 4.32 The glass-enclosed walkway connecting the historic building (left) to the new extension. Trees have been planted to echo the original entrance and the feeling of being outdoors.

Fig. 4.33 Rendering of the new extension to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. The original palace is situated to the right. Renzo Piano Building Workshop, 2010.

Fig. 4.34 Elevation from Evans Way Park. Extension to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. The original palace is situated to the right. Renzo Piano Building Workshop, 2010.



## Chapter 1: Introduction



Banksy, *What Are You Looking At?* 2004, Marble Arch, London

New museum theory, sometimes called critical museum theory, or the new museology, holds that, though museum workers commonly naturalize their policies and procedures as professional practice, the decisions these workers make reflect underlying value systems that are encoded in institutional narratives.<sup>1</sup>

This thesis is an historical study of the perils and challenges of responding to art theft, illustrated by a series of singular and somewhat alarming cautionary tales. Of central importance to this thesis is the way in which security measures, introduced as a result of an increasing awareness of the vulnerability of arts collections,

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<sup>1</sup> Marstine, Janet (ed.). 2006. *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing), 5.

contradict the process through which museums have been seeking to divest themselves of theoretical hierarchies and value judgments in recent years. A paradox has emerged between the museological rhetoric of accessibility and the implementation of security measures which, by their very nature, are predicated upon the separation of object and viewer.

Though primarily concerned with examining a range of responses to art theft, an awareness that these security measures relate as much to potential risk (such as accidental damage and vandalism) as theft is acknowledged in this thesis. However, it is the resulting separation of object and viewer, once these measures are installed, that is of primary interest here.

A major premise that this project centres on is that the evolution of a culture of fear in the international environment, which is paralleled in the art world, has left museums unprepared for the consequences of the decisions they are making in the name of object safety. These decisions, intended to protect valuable cultural collections, are having a significant impact on traditional museological issues. This new level of security has been introduced in response to international trends, identified here as three interrelated phenomena that are having a profound effect on art collections. As a point of departure from which to study the aforementioned problem, this project will look at how the escalating value of individual objects, the proliferation of museums (as represented by a rise in attendance figures), and a global increase in art theft have created an environment in which those charged with the responsibility of protecting art objects are fearing for the safety of their collections. Whilst acknowledging the historical tension between accessibility and

display within museums, and taking into account how security measures relate to risks such as vandalism and accidental damage as much as theft, this thesis will look particularly at how, in response to the aforementioned factors, some museums are installing extraordinary levels of security which have a significant impact on established viewing conditions and redefining museum space.

Furthermore, security is an area that falls outside of traditional museological discourse. The fields of museology and museum security have grown simultaneously, yet independently of one another which contributes significantly to the paradox between museum rhetoric and practice. To address the disconnection, this thesis seeks to make museum security relevant to museum discourse by aligning features related to the safeguarding of collections with contemporary museological considerations. This is a particularly important consideration given the tension between accessibility and security that has always been integral to the running of museums.

Taking the void left behind by a stolen object as a point of departure, this thesis examines the ways in which theft alters the relationship between viewer and object within museum space. Three major case studies each form a chapter exploring the various ways theft has an impact on established viewing conditions. The 1911 theft of the *Mona Lisa* from the Louvre in Paris creates an historic precedence for this investigation; it examines how conventions based upon exclusivity were dismantled by the theft, only to be reproduced by a legacy of increasingly prohibitive security measures. The 2004 theft of *The Scream* and *Madonna* from the Munch Museum in Oslo and its subsequent security upgrade reveals a paradoxical approach

to the concept of accessibility in a public institution. Finally, the theft of thirteen objects from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston in 1990 addresses the implications of theft on a fixed collection. Still unrecovered, the challenge presented by the absence of the objects has had a considerable impact on both institutional identity and public memory. An analysis of each space is balanced against material gathered from a variety of visual, textual and ephemeral sources in seeking to produce a developed understanding of the museological implications of various responses to art theft.

### **Methodology**

The objective of this thesis is to investigate the museological implications of art theft on public art collections. The approach taken forms an historical study of the challenges of responding to threats and experiences of museum security. As such, this thesis does not seek, as a more philosophical project might, to disclose general truths but aims to illustrate these challenges through instructive examples.

To begin, the field of art theft requires mapping and quantifying. An examination of the aforementioned three factors (the increasing value of individual objects, the proliferation of museums as represented by a rise in attendance figures and an increase in art theft) supports the preliminary question of why we should be concerned about art theft and outlines how this situation leaves museums in a vulnerable position due to an increasing amount of pressure on museums to protect their collections. However, since this is an area that falls outside of traditional

museological discourse, this thesis will first seek to establish a reconsideration of the relationship of security to museum practice.

A survey of the literature was arranged into the three broader categories of museology, museum security and art theft; subjects between which there is a notable lack of intersection. As will be discussed in greater detail, security, though recognised as an important component of museum practice, has not yet been well-addressed within the more theoretical discourses concerning the form and function of museums. In recent years much attention has been paid to the various processes by which knowledge is produced and disseminated to a museum's audience (such as conservation, exhibition display, administration and education) and it is hoped that bringing the subject of security and its ability to inform and influence these processes into existing dialogue will contribute to a deeper understanding of museological practice.

Each case study was selected because of the unique points for consideration that resulted from an examination of those particular thefts. The empty void on the wall was a feature common to each theft, however, the differences in the treatment of that space and what those decisions produced comprises the latter focus of this project.

Furthermore, as far as can be determined at this point, this appears to be the first effort at compiling a literature review for both the field of museum security as well as art theft. This suggests that the professional nature of the sources has ensured that they remain outside academic discourse and it is hoped that, at the very least, this compilation will be of use to further studies in the field.



## **Literature Review**

### **I. Museological Literature**

Since the late 1980s, an increasing body of literature has emerged that engages with museum practice. As Peter Vergo's *The New Museology* (1989) was published, curators and other museum staff were critically analysing their practice and this information was being disseminated to a wider audience. This would lead to a fusion, albeit sometimes a fractious one, of academics and professionals commenting, criticising and theorising about the functions of museums. As Vergo asserted, this new museology was 'a widespread dissatisfaction with the "old" museology...what is wrong with the "old" museology is that is too much about museum *methods* and too little about the purposes of the museum.'<sup>2</sup> What came out of this generation of scholarship is a theory of 'museology', the study of museums and how they function with an emphasis on the relationship between museums and their audiences.

Seminal texts emerged that considered the history and function of museums and their ability to construct meaning, including Stephen Weil, *Rethinking the Museum: and other meditations* (1990), Ivan Karp and Stephen D. Levine (editors), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (1991), Ivan Karp *et al.*, *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (1992), Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (1993), Daniel J. Sherman and Irit Rogoff (editors), *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (1994), Marcia Pointon (editor),

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<sup>2</sup> Vergo, Peter. 1989. *The New Museology* (London, Reaktion Books), 3.

*Art Apart: Art Institutions and Ideology across England and North America* (1994), Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (1992), *Museums and their Visitors* (1994) and *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (2000), and Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (1995), Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside public art museums* (1995) and Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (editors), *Thinking About Exhibitions* (1996).<sup>3</sup>

A decade later, museological study was largely established and being taught in universities and colleges; more pedagogical in nature, large-volume collaborations between academics and museum professionals contextualising the burgeoning field of museology appeared including Andrew McClellan, *Art and Its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium* (2003), Bettina Messias Carbonell, *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts* (2004), Sharon MacDonald, *A Companion to Museum Studies* (2006), Janet Marstine, *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction* (2006).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Weil, Stephen E. 1990. *Rethinking the Museum: and other meditations* (Washington and London, Smithsonian Institution); Karp, Ivan and Stephen D. Levine (eds.). 1991. *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington and London, Smithsonian Institution); Karp, Ivan, Christine Mullen Kreamer and Steven D. Levine (eds.). 1992. *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture* (Washington and London, Smithsonian Institution); Crimp, Douglas. 1993. *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press); Sherman, Daniel J. and Irit Rogoff (eds.). 1994. *Museum Culture: Histories, Discourses, Spectacles* (London, Routledge); Pointon, Marcia (ed.). 1994. *Art Apart: Art Institutions and Ideology across England and North America* (Manchester, Manchester University Press); Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean. 1992. *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (London, Routledge); Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean. 1994. *Museums and their Visitors* (London, Routledge); Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean. 2000. *Museums and the Interpretation of Visual Culture* (London, Routledge); Bennett, Tony. 1995. *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (Oxford, Routledge); Duncan, Carol. 1995. *Civilizing Rituals: inside public art museums* (London, Routledge); Greenberg, Reesa, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (eds.). 1996. *Thinking About Exhibitions* (London, Routledge).

<sup>4</sup> McClellan, Andrew. 2003. *Art and Its Publics: Museum Studies at the Millennium* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing); Carbonell, Bettina Messias. 2004. *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing); Marstine, Janet. (ed.). 2006. *New Museum Theory and Practice: An Introduction* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing); MacDonald, Sharon. 2006. *A Companion to Museum Studies* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishing).

From this criticism of established policies and strategies a move towards greater reflexivity (attention to the processes by which knowledge is produced and disseminated) was advocated. However, while issues of conservation, exhibition display, administration and education were frequently examined as a function of museum practice, security rarely was. A trend in the literature is to acknowledge security alongside these other functions, such as the paragraph does below, but it is rarely examined for its ability to affect the accessibility and display of a collection.

Decisions that museum workers make – about mission statement, architecture, financial matters, acquisitions, cataloguing, exhibition display, wall texts, educational programming, repatriation requests, community relations, conservation, web design, security and reproduction – all impact on the way we understand objects. Museums are not neutral spaces that speak with one institutional, authoritative voice. Museums are about individuals making subjective choices.<sup>5</sup>

As evidenced by the literature review, this generally acknowledged function of museum practice falls outside of the recent museological discourse. The problem this creates is that a reconsideration of museological practice that examines the function of security and its relationship to accessibility and display directly contradicts the popular rhetoric of reflexivity in museums. On a basic level, museum security is founded upon principles of exclusion and separation. The importance placed upon visitor experience and encouraging interaction within the museum context is challenged by the presence of security which is predicated on the separation of viewer and object.

Furthermore, the implementation of security measures for certain objects and not others suggests an institutional prioritisation; the acknowledgement of which is

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<sup>5</sup> Marstine 2006, 2.

likely an uncomfortable subject for museums. In the absence of the critical attention that other components of museum practice have received, a paradox between rhetoric and practice has emerged whereby the security measures implemented in display strategies are often outward symbols of the hierarchical value judgements from which museums profess to distance themselves. By incorporating security into museological sources that document contemporary practices a more developed sense of the function of museums could be offered.

A notable exception in the literature occurs in an article with particular relevance to this thesis. Helen Rees Leahy's *Exhibiting Absence In the Museum* (2011) uses the theft of the *Mona Lisa* from the Louvre in 1911 to illustrate how the experience of absence in the museum is rather different, although not necessarily less spectacular, when it is unplanned and unexpected.<sup>6</sup> She suggests that absence in the museum hovers between memory (of objects lost, forgotten or beyond reach) and anticipation (of objects that will be found, returned or acquired).<sup>7</sup> The investigation of the various responses to theft in this project certainly falls in line with this view. While the duration of absence experienced at the Louvre and Munch Museum post theft was shorter (the paintings were missing for two years at each museum), the reaction of those institutions was arguably more dramatic than that of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, where empty frames have hung on the walls since 1990 in a perfect illustration of the notion of absence hovering somewhere between memory and anticipation.

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<sup>6</sup> Rees Leahy, Helen. 2011. 'Exhibiting Absence in the Museum', in *The Thing about Museums: Objects and Experience, Representation and Contestation* ed. Sandra Dudley et al. (London, Routledge), 250.

<sup>7</sup> Rees Leahy 2011, 251.

Moreover, recent literature surrounding the history of museum visiting from around the late eighteenth century onwards provide a location, though at times indirectly, to expand upon the function of security within museums. In particular, the following sources provide a useful context for the historical tension between accessibility and security which is important to acknowledge in this thesis. Charlotte Klonk, in *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000* (2009)<sup>8</sup> makes interesting connections between art galleries, the street and shop windows in producing what she calls a ‘truly public space’ in the early twentieth century, concepts that will be expanded upon in the Louvre case study. Also, in *Museum Bodies: The Politics and Practices of Visiting and Viewing* (2012), Helen Rees Leahy investigates how museums have accommodated and inculcated different modes of viewing and experience since the eighteenth century. She concludes that how visitors conduct themselves inside the exhibition, their navigation of space and their interaction with fellow spectators are as important to the operation of the museum today as they were 250 years ago.<sup>9</sup> Pertinent to this thesis, instead of concentrating on the regulation of the visitor’s experience by the museum, Rees Leahy also questions the effects of visitors’ bodies on the practice of the institution.

What follows from a reading of the previous texts is an increasing awareness that the anxiety about museum publics, and the risk they pose to art collections through damage accidental or otherwise, is not a new phenomenon. A good reference for this is Jonah Siegel’s *The Emergence of the Modern Museum: An Anthology of*

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<sup>8</sup> Klonk, Charlotte. 2009. *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000* (New Haven, Yale University Press).

<sup>9</sup> Rees Leahy, Helen. 2012. *Museum Bodies: The Politics and Practices of Visiting and Viewing* (Farnham, Ashgate).

*Nineteenth-Century Sources* (2008) which attentively documents concerns regarding class, gender and age of museum visitors in the early days of the National Gallery and British Museum. For example, in an 1832 anonymous letter published in the *Penny Magazine*, the (working class) public is encouraged to visit the British Museum by detailing the ways in which one should feel that they are an entitled member (as a taxpayer) of the visiting population, and specially to not be intimidated by the gates, warders, or one's 'homely garb'.<sup>10</sup> The three rules a visitor should observe included in the letter – 'touch nothing', 'do not talk loud', and 'be not obtrusive' – suggest a set of assumptions about the behaviour of the public in the museum.

Not only does the language used to explain codes of conduct confirm the presence of an uneasy tension between museums and their publics, for instance, 'You will see many things in the Museum that you do not understand', but the imagined example cited to illustrate why one must not touch the objects is grounded in an anxiety about the safety of objects, and in this particular incidence, vandalism.<sup>11</sup>

1<sup>st</sup>. *Touch nothing*. The statues, and other curious things, which are in the Museum, are to be seen, not to be handled. If visitors were to be allowed to touch them, to try whether they are hard or soft, to scratch them, to write upon them with their pencils, they would soon be worth very little. You will see some mutilated remains of two or three of the finest figures that ever were executed in the world: they form part of the collection called the Elgin Marbles...Is it not as great ignorance

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<sup>10</sup> Anonymous, 'The British Museum', *The Penny Magazine* I (1832), 13. As cited in Siegel, Jonah. 2008. *The Emergence of the Modern Museum: An Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Sources* (New York, Oxford University Press), 82-84.

<sup>11</sup> Anonymous, 'The British Museum', *The Penny Magazine* I (1832), 13. As cited in Siegel, Jonah. 2008. *The Emergence of the Modern Museum: An Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Sources* (New York, Oxford University Press), 84.

for a stupid fellow of our own day slyly to write his own paltry name upon one of these glorious monuments?<sup>12</sup>

The topic of vandalism in the museum is especially pertinent for a discussion about how security measures, discussed in this thesis mainly as a response to particular examples of art theft, are longstanding features in the function of museums and relate to other potential threats such as accidental damage and terrorism.

As with art theft, incidences of vandalism are difficult to quantify due to the absence of reliable figures, though there does seem to be agreement that attacks on art in museums are numerous.<sup>13</sup> Much of the trouble in quantifying both theft and vandalism has to do with the reporting of incidences. In *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (1997) Dario Gamboni discusses the ‘contagious nature of aggression’ which is seen as a reason why some museums might be reluctant to publicise details of attacks upon works of art.<sup>14</sup> This ‘silence’ within museums regarding the topic of vandalism is also addressed by Peter Moritz Pickshaus (1988) who claims, ‘curators tend to avoid giving out information, and even to renounce legal actions and claim for damages’.<sup>15</sup> Whilst no specific support is given for his statement, sources generally agree that a fear of copy-cat

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<sup>12</sup> Anonymous, ‘The British Museum’, *The Penny Magazine* I (1832), 13. As cited in Siegel, Jonah. 2008. *The Emergence of the Modern Museum: An Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Sources* (New York, Oxford University Press), 84.

<sup>13</sup> A rigorous attempt at mapping the field of vandalism can be found in Dario Gamboni. 1997. *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (London, Reaktion), 190.

<sup>14</sup> Gamboni 1997, 193.

<sup>15</sup> Pickshaus, Pieter Moritz. 1988. *Kunstzerstörer: Fallstudien; Tatmotive und Psychogramme* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt), 11-14. As quoted in Gamboni 1997, 193.

attacks and the attention-seeking component of vandalism which relies on publicity place museums in a difficult position.<sup>16</sup>

In an article that applies the metaphor of rape to acts of vandalism against works of art, Gridley McKim-Smith (2002) considers the paradoxical function of museums central to this thesis: ‘while a museum has a mission to preserve and protect the works it houses, it also has the obligation to exhibit those precious works, exposing them to the general public and thus to harm’.<sup>17</sup> Regarding the absence of reliable figures, the article suggests that the perception that a vandalised work of art decreases in value contributes to a lack of reporting of incidences.

Resembling females in traditional societies, paintings occupy a position that approaches the sacred, so that touching them is prohibited. Yet once someone does lay hands on them, and once that violation is made public, their value declines.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, even when an attack becomes public knowledge, newspaper reports often constitute the only material available beyond anecdotal information communicated verbally (and not for publication) by collectors and museum personnel.<sup>19</sup> This might be intentional. As Gamboni states,

...a wish to deny the existence of reactions that, if considered meaningful, must imply some kind of criticism of the museum and of the art or culture it stands for. In this respect, the purely technical character of most answers to iconoclastic actions cannot be regarded as deriving solely from the difficulties of probing into heterogeneous and disputed causes.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See Gamboni 1997, 193, McKim-Smith, Gridley. 2002. ‘The Rhetoric of Rape, the Language of Vandalism’, *Woman’s Art Journal*, 23, 1 (Spring – Summer), 30, and Pickshaus 1998, 11-14.

<sup>17</sup> McKim-Smith 2002, 30.

<sup>18</sup> McKim-Smith 2002, 29.

<sup>19</sup> McKim-Smith 2002, 30.

<sup>20</sup> Gamboni 1997, 193.



This observation – that a museum’s actions or responses to art crime can reinforce or preserve the disparity of information within museological discourse – is an extremely interesting consideration. For instance, ‘Protective measures taken by museum staffs are generally of a technical and organizational nature, and derive from an analysis of the methods of aggression rather than of its motives.’<sup>21</sup> It is these ‘protective measures’ taken by museums that concern this thesis, as opposed to the motivations behind the crimes (something that is more appropriately addressed within the fields of criminology and/or psychology as will be discussed later in this chapter). This is important to keep in mind considering that one of the major findings in the literature survey of this thesis is that art theft and museum security texts are almost exclusively technical and professional in nature.

## **II. Museum Security Literature**

The following survey is an attempt to collect sources concerned with the safekeeping of objects in hopes of developing a better understanding of the location of security within discourses of museology. As will be evidenced, the literature is very ambiguous about the subject of security and this inability to properly identify and define its relationship to museum practice has relegated it to the footnotes of a larger discourse.

In recent years, texts pertaining to the more widely discussed issues of museum management such as exhibition display and collections care have begun to mention the topic of security as an associated component of museum practice.

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<sup>21</sup> Gamboni 1997, 193.

However, these references are brief, overly simplistic and in most cases simply refer onwards to other sources for more detailed information. The sources referred to are comprised of professional security literature and primarily take the form of a security manual. These manuals are directed at those within the security profession and, judging by their format and content, not written with consideration of the capacity of these decisions to influence the accessibility and display of a collection, as well as the institution's communication with its audiences.

The 1960s saw an emergence of literature that began to focus on the safety of objects, though it was largely interpreted under the practice of conservation or collections care. As will be discussed later in the chapter, this same period in time also witnessed a previously unprecedented rise in the value of individual art objects as well as an increase in art theft. These factors seem to have contributed to a growing concern for the safety of objects and a general interest in their condition, display, storage and travel arrangements as reflected in the literature.

For instance, two of the earliest seminal texts in conservation and museum practice were both written by prominent conservator Caroline K. Keck (who, along with her husband Sheldon Keck, founded the Conservation Center of the Institute of Fine Arts at New York University).<sup>22</sup> In both *How to Take Care of Your Pictures* (1954) and *Handbook on the Care of Paintings* (1965), the subject of security emerges as something that is specific to conservation, such as the correct way to 'secure' a painting within a frame by wedging slices of bottle corks between the

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<sup>22</sup> Following World War II, the Kecks established conservation departments in numerous museums including Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim Museum in New York, as well as the Phillips Collection in Washington. Caroline Keck was also a personal conservator for painters Georgia O'Keeffe and Edwin Dickinson and for the art collection of Nelson A. Rockefeller.

frame and painting.<sup>23</sup> This interpretation seems to have aligned the concept of security as something more related to an object's environmental condition and this is the context in which the subject is presented in Keck's next two major works *A Primer on Museum Security* (1966) and *Safeguarding Your Collection in Travel* (1970).<sup>24</sup>

For example, in *Safeguarding Your Collection in Travel*, the proper methods involved in the preparation and packing of an object to travel are detailed which at the time included how to mark a crate with clearly visible shipping labels drawing attention to the valuable objects inside; something no longer recommended for obvious reasons. Importantly however, in neither text is there any mention of procedures or policies dealing with theft or the implementation of security apparatus.

In 1972, Per E. Guldbeck published *The Care of Historical Collections: A Conservation Handbook for the Nonspecialist*.<sup>25</sup> In this book, Guldbeck devotes a four-page chapter to security. An indication of this generation's attitude towards the subject may be supplied by the second sentence of the chapter,

It is awkward to call the police and insurance company about a missing item only to find out later that it is hanging in the director's office, or a trustee has borrowed it, and that neither of them thought to notify you that they had removed it from storage.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Keck, Caroline K. 1954. *How to take care of your pictures: A primer of practical information* (New York, Museum of Modern Art and the Brooklyn Museum) and Keck, Caroline K. 1965. *Handbook on the Care of Paintings* (Nashville, The American Association for State and Local History). For the reference to securing a painting see Keck 1965, 20.

<sup>24</sup> Keck, Caroline K., Huntington T. Block, Joseph Chapman, John Lawton and Nathan Stollow. 1966. *A Primer on Museum Security* (Cooperstown, New York State Historical Association) and Keck, Caroline K. 1970. *Safeguarding Your Collection in Travel* (Nashville, The American Association for State and Local History).

<sup>25</sup> Guldbeck, Per E. 1972. *The Care of Historical Collections: A Conservation Handbook for the Nonspecialist* (Nashville: The American Association for State and Local History). This book is dedicated to Sheldon and Caroline Keck, a further indication of their significant contribution to the field.

<sup>26</sup> Guldbeck 1972, 7.

Guldbeck presents an exceedingly brief, but at times thoughtful outline of museum security. He states in his preface that this book is aimed at those in small historical societies and ‘serious amateurs’ who may be overwhelmed by technical literature.<sup>27</sup> He suggests keeping access to keys at a minimum, adequate lighting, hiring alert, friendly and interested guards and paying them a living wage, installing up-to-date alarm systems, and taking precautions about where one places objects so as to prevent theft and accidental damage. Interestingly, he notes that vulnerable objects should be placed out of reach or behind glass, but that ‘So-called “psychological barriers” are as a rule effective only with the class of people who would not dream of touching or picking up objects anyway’.<sup>28</sup> In the form that subsequent museum practice and security texts begin to take, the chapter concludes with five sources of further suggested reading on the subject of security.<sup>29</sup>

The following year, John FitzMaurice published *Treasure Keepers* (1973), a conservation-influenced book that noted some examples where theft, vandalism and accidental damage caused ‘special measures’ to be employed in the display of objects.<sup>30</sup> Examples of these measures included alarm systems, CCTV, rope barriers and Perspex cases and their use in a few cases were cited but particular attention was paid to the packing of objects in transit. Albeit very briefly, FitzMaurice looks at the

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<sup>27</sup> Guldbeck 1972, ix.

<sup>28</sup> Guldbeck 1972, 7.

<sup>29</sup> The sources include Gage, Babcock, and Associates. 1963. *Protecting the Library and Its Resources: A Guide to Physical Protection Insurance* (Chicago, American Library Association), Keck, et.al. 1966, Lawton, John B. and Huntington T. Block. December 1966. ‘Museum Insurance’, *Curator*, 9, 289-297, ‘Safe Art’, *Architectural and Engineering News*, January 1967, and Sugden, Robert P. 1948. *Safeguarding Works of Art: Storage, Packing, Transportation, and Insurance* (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art).

<sup>30</sup> FitzMaurice, John. 1973. *Treasure Keepers* (London, Aldus).

problematics involved in the display and protection of objects, for instance, where light levels and security factors have to be weighed against access and display.

In 1979, Donald L. Mason's *The Fine Art of Art Security: Protecting public and private collections against theft, fire and vandalism* reflected a change in the way security was interpreted.<sup>31</sup> Emerging from underneath the umbrella of conservation, Mason presented museum security as a field of its own, a necessary component of museum practice. Aiding this transition was Mason's personal background in the field of art crime. Mason was the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation's senior art theft and art fraud investigator until his retirement in 1976. He was based in New York City, and for the first eight of his eleven years in this field, he was the only FBI agent who worked exclusively on art crimes.<sup>32</sup>

Mason begins his book by linking the escalating value of art and the rise of art theft. He cites the November 1961 purchase of Rembrandt's *Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer* by the Metropolitan Museum of Art for \$2.3 million as a starting point for the trend of record breaking auction prices. As the first painting to be purchased for over \$1 million, what followed, in his terms, was a 'golden era' for art prices and museum publicity, with an increase in attendance in galleries, auction houses and museums which served to trigger the 'nefarious mind of the art thief'.<sup>33</sup> Mason continues by citing examples of some high profile thefts such as the 1972 robbery of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts where eighteen paintings were stolen, the theft of ten paintings from the Pitti Palace Museum in Florence in

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<sup>31</sup> Mason, Donald L. 1979. *The Fine Art of Art Security: Protecting public and private collections against theft, fire and vandalism* (New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold).

<sup>32</sup> Mason 1979, 9-10.

<sup>33</sup> Mason 1979, 5.

April 1978 (both of which were entered via skylights), the theft of a Rembrandt from the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in April 1975, the February 1976 theft of 119 paintings by Picasso from the Papal Palace in Avignon, France, and the case at St. Louis, Missouri, where on 29 January 1978 and 20 February 1978 thieves stole various sculptures including three Rodin bronzes.<sup>34</sup>

After establishing a rise in thefts and the vulnerability of art collections, he devotes the rest of the book to security recommendations for galleries, museums, libraries and private collections. This appears to be the first direct application of security to arts institutions under the pretext of theft prevention. Mason's recommendations are highly sophisticated for the time, and he details usage of the systems in very professional language; even including equipment costs where available. Although ground breaking in identifying an increasing trend in art theft and applying this risk to museums, it is still very much a book aimed at the security sector. Although Mason touches upon the very phenomena that are used in this thesis (linking the increase in art theft with the rise in market values, museum attendance and the vulnerability of collections) these important considerations take up no more than a page or two. This book does, however, establish that there is awareness on the part of the FBI and international bodies such as UNESCO and Interpol, of an increasing risk to object safety in the 1970s which will be examined later.

In a subsequent chapter concerning security and vandalism, which he admits is virtually not preventable or predictable, Mason makes a comment that has direct application to this thesis's examination of the security measures introduced following

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<sup>34</sup> Mason 1979, 7.

a theft. ‘Some art observers believe that in the next decade or two going to a museum will be similar to visiting an aquarium – everything will be behind glass’.<sup>35</sup> As will be shown in various examples, this will in fact become the case on many occasions.

Ralph Lewis’s *Handbook of Museum Technology* (1982), was sponsored by the United States Department of the Interior with the intention of providing curatorial standards and serving as a reference for museum workers everywhere, as well as students and those generally interested in museums.<sup>36</sup> It was aimed particularly at historical museums, such as those in the National Parks in the United States, but was intended to be applicable to any other kind of collection. With respect to security, a chapter is devoted to ‘Protection’; the safety of museum objects and of the people in the museum. Here, the book considers security in terms of housekeeping precautions, reducing visitor accidents, and environmental and fire damage. ‘Visitor abuse’ and burglary are covered briefly (recommendations include rope barriers, alert attendants, secure locks, and alarm systems). Visitor abuse is defined as deliberate damage caused by visitors taking or leaving a souvenir of their visit, and more rarely when, ‘a psychopathic individual wreaks wanton destruction’.<sup>37</sup>

A large portion of the chapter is dedicated to rope barriers, which are considered to be a supplementary protective measure (to alert staff members). Interestingly, the discussion of rope barriers touches on the psychological impact of such measures within what reads as a very programmatic resource manual. ‘All barriers are intrusive, but some detract surprisingly little from the sense of history

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<sup>35</sup> Mason 1979, 67.

<sup>36</sup> Lewis, Ralph H. (ed.). 1982. *Handbook of Museum Technology* (New York, Research and Education Association), iii.

<sup>37</sup> Lewis 1982, 281.

that visitors experience'.<sup>38</sup> The author outlines three characteristics that make rope barriers least objectionable: that they remain below the line of sight while visitors form their impressions of the furnished space beyond, that they appear neat and attractive when noticed because they meet good standards in design, materials, workmanship, installation and maintenance, and that they 'provide a comfortable feeling of assurance about where it is proper to go in a museum, implying more strongly that visitors are welcome here than forbidden there'.<sup>39</sup>

In the whole literature review, this is the only instance where rope barriers have not only been recommended for practical reasons, but considered for their impact on visitors as well as museum space. What can broadly be considered a separation between object and viewer is here seen as not necessarily a measure that encourages interaction between the two, but something that at least provides a visitor with a sense of place and direction which, admittedly, could foster a certain sense of comfort within spaces that can often be intimidating or confusing. Lewis argues that that the use of rope barriers promotes the feeling of being 'welcome here' which is stronger than the idea of being 'forbidden there' (i.e. the other side of the barrier). While this discussion is commendable for its foray into unexplored territory, it is suggested here that author's point is rather diluted by the examples used. For instance, one of the accompanying images includes Mrs. Vanderbilt's bedroom at the Vanderbilt Mansion, Hyde Park, New York [Fig. 1.1].

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<sup>38</sup> Lewis 1982, 283.

<sup>39</sup> Lewis 1982, 283.



By its very nature this is an intimate space, one where only a privileged few would have ever been admitted. It is unlikely that the rope barriers that visually, theoretically and physically delineate public from private space signify a welcoming gesture. Instead, they preserve a separation between visitor and object; a concept that will be expanded in this thesis.

Reflecting an awareness of security at the higher levels within museum administration, in 1985 Richard Carroll wrote an article aimed at museum directors and trustees.<sup>40</sup> He highlighted the need for museums to have a security program with a clearly defined set of objectives to be director-recommended, board-adopted, implemented by the head of security under the full support of the director. This security program would include a new security system (electronics and hardware commonly used for entry and fire detection), and guards and other personnel would be required to implement a comprehensive program of security and public safety. One aspect of the article touches on the delicate balance between the display and accessibility of objects. ‘There is no natural or artificial light source whose rays are altogether harmless, but that is no reason to keep works of art, that are made to be seen, in complete darkness’.<sup>41</sup> As will be discussed later in the thesis, this reference draws a parallel with one of the problems facing museums today: that the safest way to display objects is to lock them in a vault, away from public view.

In 1985, the Museums Association (United Kingdom), the International Institute for Conservation and the British Museum held a two-day conference entitled

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<sup>40</sup> Carroll, Richard. 1985. ‘Security Begins at the Top’, *International Journal of Museum Management and Curatorship*, 4, 373-77.

<sup>41</sup> Hours, Madeleine. 1976. *Conservation and Scientific Analysis of Painting* (New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold), 105-6. As cited in Carroll 1985.

‘Safety in Museums and Galleries’ in London. In 1987 the conference proceedings were published in *Safety in Museums and Galleries*.<sup>42</sup> The purpose of the conference was to review approaches to occupational safety in museums and galleries as they affected staff and visiting public. Interestingly, the topics of theft and security were omitted from this wide-reaching publication. The fact that they were omitted (though fire and accidental damage were included) might suggest that the risk of theft and armed robbery (and threats to the personal safety of staff arising therein) had not yet manifested itself as a problem for museums. A short survey of other occupational safety sources confirms this.<sup>43</sup>

In looking at literature that discussed security within the context of exhibition design, Margaret Hall’s seminal work, *On Display: A Design Grammar for Museum Exhibitions* (1987), revealed an important link between increasing museum attendance and the rise in blockbuster exhibitions which led to the emergence of a condition of display that reflected the ‘importance’ and ‘value’ of the objects on view.<sup>44</sup> Hall, who designed what many consider the first ‘blockbuster’ exhibition (*Treasures of Tutankhamun*, British Museum, 1972), situates her book in the midst of the ‘exhibition boom’ where the increase in the number of visitors to museums in the previous two decades (from the late 1960s to the late 1980s) resulted from the growth of special, temporary exhibitions.

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<sup>42</sup> Howie, Frank (ed.). 1987. *Safety in Museums and Galleries* (London, Butterworths).

<sup>43</sup> The following three sources were selected as a sample survey: i) Scottish Society for Conservation and Restoration. 1986. *Health and Safety*, Bulletin no. 6, ii) McGriffin, Robert F. 1985. ‘Health and safety in the museum workplace’, *Museum News*, 64, 2, 36-43, and iii) Smithsonian Institution. 1980. *Safety Handbook*, SSH 620 (Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution).

<sup>44</sup> Hall, Margaret. 1987. *On Display: A Design Grammar for Museum Exhibitions* (London, Lund Humphries).

The book is intended to take the form of a formula for professional exhibition designers to follow. It is a history from which today's exhibitions have developed, from seventeenth-century cabinets of curiosities through to the dramatic spatial changes in the 1920s and culminates in the exhibition she believes ushered in the blockbuster era: the Royal Academy's 1961 exhibition of *The Book of Kells: Treasures of Trinity College Dublin*.<sup>45</sup> Pertinent for this thesis is what Hall pinpoints as the strength of a blockbuster exhibition: the way in which the objects were 'isolated by their presentation, and revered'<sup>46</sup> [Fig. 1.2]. Incidentally, the year 1961 coincides with the Metropolitan Museum of Art's purchase of Rembrandt's *Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer* for the unprecedented sum of \$2.3 million which, as Mason (1979) noted, was a starting point for the trend of record breaking auction prices. Thus, the presentation of objects in these blockbuster exhibitions draws a parallel with the perceptible increase in value of objects at auction. It will be discussed further in the chapter how the display of these objects, particularly in blockbuster exhibitions, reinforced an awareness of this value even whilst museums were seeking to align themselves with the rhetoric of transparency.

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<sup>45</sup> Hall cites other notable exhibitions such as the 1925 *Exposition des Arts Décoratifs* in Paris where an exposed, structural framework supporting exhibits and text panels was employed, creating a formula for contemporary universal exhibitions. The analysis of space in 1920s Germany emerging from the Bauhaus was changing the way space was used in museums. Hall notes how, in the *Deutscher Werkbund* exhibition in Paris in 1930, Walter Gropius and Herbert Bayer placed exhibits in a definite sequence to express organic flow. Thus, a sensation of fluidity was increased by the use of curved walls with the aim to extend the visitor's field of vision. Changing levels as a form of punctuation between areas and seeing one area from another were important exhibition design elements to emerge. Furthermore, Bayer's *The Bauhaus 1919-1928* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1938 used shapes and footprints on the floor to direct the walking visitors. Hall 1987, 16-17.

<sup>46</sup> Hall 1987, 17.

Also of interest in Hall's discourse on exhibition display is the statement that a display case is 'a recognition of limitations'.<sup>47</sup> It would seem that Hall views these cases as necessary evil. She goes on to explain,

The ideal 'all-purpose' showcase probably has not yet been designed. The perfect case would combine complete security and ease of access, stability, and at the same time meet requirements for conservation, flexible lighting, and an infinite range of display facilities, while being a thing of beauty without detracting from the exhibits themselves.<sup>48</sup>

Although not expanded upon any more than this, the above comments reveal perhaps the most reflective thinking about the function of museum security to date.

Moreover, there seems to be a keen awareness of the problematic balance between accessibility and display which is inherent to museum security.

Following the formula which permeates this literature, Hall concludes the book with a bibliography, organised by subject which roughly corresponds to chapters in the book. Under the subheading of security, she includes twelve sources ranging from HMSO fire testing standards and reports to a selection of security manuals.<sup>49</sup>

By the 1990s, security literature has gradually moved out from under the umbrella of conservation to become more closely associated either with texts detailing exhibition design and museum planning (which still only include a small reference to security) or texts specific to security guidelines (primarily in the form of manuals or reports). Often, these sources are the published proceedings of an

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<sup>47</sup> Hall 1982, 72.

<sup>48</sup> Hall 1982, 72.

<sup>49</sup> In addition to sources pertaining to fire prevention, the security manuals referred to include: Fennelly, Lawrence, J. 1983. *Museum, Archive and Library Security* (London, Butterworth); Gibbs-Smith, C.H. 1971. *The Art of Observation: A Booklet for Museum Wardens* (London, Victoria and Albert Museum); Keller, Steven R. 1965. 'Taking Steps Towards Better toward Better Museum Security', *Curator*, XXVIII, 1; Mannings, J. 1970. 'Security of Museums and Art Galleries', *Museums Journal*, 70,1; Mason 1979; Information Sheet, no. 25. 1981. (London, Museums Association); Tillotson, R.G. 1973. *Museum Security*, (Paris, ICOM).

increasing number of security-related conferences and international gatherings.

These include *Museums, Security and Protection: A Handbook* (1993) published by the International Council of Museums for Cultural Heritage Institutions (ICOM), and *Improving Museum Security* (1997) by the Museums and Galleries Commission (MGC).<sup>50</sup> This reflects the growing international awareness of museum security, which will later be linked to an increase in art theft. It should be noted however, that a significant lack of intersection still exists between this international awareness of the vulnerability of art collections and more theoretical discourses on museum practice.

Also emerging at this time are texts related to museum planning which, as opposed to exhibition design, focus on the importance of larger issues such as the economic health of the institution and the running of the museum as a corporate entity. One of these primary sources is *Forward Planning: A handbook of business, corporate and development planning for museums and galleries* (1991).<sup>51</sup> Taking the form of a reference guide, the book includes a contribution by Brian Dovey, Museum Security Adviser at the Museum and Galleries Commission (MGC).<sup>52</sup> The chapter details four main requirements that a forward plan should seek to fulfill for effective security in museums and galleries. First, the provision of strong physical protection to the openings in the building perimeter; second, the installation of automatic

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<sup>50</sup> International Council of Museums for Cultural Heritage Institutions (ICOM). 1993. *Museums, Security and Protection: A Handbook* (London, Routledge); Museums and Galleries Commission. 1997. *Improving Museum Security* (London, Museum and Galleries Commission).

<sup>51</sup> Ambrose, Timothy and Sue Runyard (ed.). 1991. *Forward Planning: A handbook of business, corporate and development planning for museums and galleries* (London: Routledge).

<sup>52</sup> The Museums and Galleries Commission (MGC) would eventually become the Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries (MLA). The MLA is disbanding in 2012 and museum-related functions (which include the remit of the National Security Advisor) will transfer to the Arts Council England.

intruder and fire detector systems in support of the physical defenses; third, the deployment of well-trained attendants throughout the building; and fourth, the adoption of an internal security regime devised to cope with the particular needs of the institution.<sup>53</sup>

A brief paragraph is given to each of these requirements and the chapter (which comprises less than three pages in total) concludes that a successful forward plan will contain a security plan to which all staff has contributed. This is an excellent example of the lack of intersection between theory and practice. As there are no suggestions with respect to how this aim might be achieved, it would seem that these guidelines assume that an institution, perhaps a museum security director, will take it upon themselves to facilitate inter-institutional cooperation and input from all staff for their security plan. On the other hand, more cynically, perhaps the ambiguous nature of these guidelines is simply the product of rhetoric espoused by an administrative body that wants to be seen as promoting cross-collaborative initiatives, but without having to resolve the problems involved in facilitating that process. Furthermore, like the other professional sources on the subject, the book follows a common pattern in making a brief mention of security, providing a few short recommendations, but generally refers the reader onto a list of other professional texts for further information.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ambrose and Runyard 1991, 102-104.

<sup>54</sup> The four sources the book recommends are Bugg, D.E. and C. Bridges. 1982. *Burglary, Protection and Insurance Surveys* (Stone & Cox); Burke, R.B., and S. Adeloyle. 1986. *A Manual of Basic Museum Security* (International Congress of Museums); Hamilton, P. and N. Currer-Briggs. 1990. *Handbook of Museum Security* (Croner Publications); and Hoare, Nell. 1990. *Security for Museums* (Committee for Area Museums Councils and Museums Association).

One of the most seminal texts in the field of museum security remains *Security in Museums, Archives and Libraries: a Practical Guide* (2003).<sup>55</sup> Published by Resource, a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, this large-scale volume is a self-proclaimed ‘general guide’ aimed at providing security managers with basic information on operational procedures and guidance as to where more detailed information can be found.<sup>56</sup> Owing to its widespread distribution, this text has become the benchmark security manual in cultural institutions throughout the United Kingdom. While it has formally established a foundation for the implementation of security in museums, libraries and archives, the nature of the information remains directed at those in the security profession.

This has resulted in the emergence of museum security as a separate entity within museum practice. Although this thesis is concerned with the larger implications of security measures on museums, and in particular on space and audience, the isolation of security within museology frequently causes smaller, daily conflicts between curators and security staff. For instance, the changing nature of displays within museums makes the versatility of temporary hanging walls appealing. However, as recounted by security consultant Steven R. Keller (former Executive Director of Protection Services for the Art Institute of Chicago), hanging walls are the enemy of the museum security because ‘Curators have a knack for

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<sup>55</sup> Resource: The Council for Museums, Archives and Libraries. 2003. *Security in Museums, Archives and Libraries: a Practical Guide* (London, Resource).

<sup>56</sup> Resource 2003, v.

adding temporary walls directly in front of detectors'.<sup>57</sup> This necessitates the overdesigning of security systems, adding to aesthetic and budgetary problems. Another example is when a curator wants to work late into the evening alone in a museum. Often, an entire alarm system had to be turned off making themselves and the museum vulnerable. This is a particular problem considering museum burglaries often occur by a thief remaining in the building after hours.<sup>58</sup>

Because of the growing concern for the safety of collections and the parallel development of the field of museum security, proper practice, due diligence and clear guidelines now exist for museums to follow. However, the disconnection between security and contemporary discourses of space and display means that the rhetoric of museums, particularly in terms of accessibility and reflexivity, contradicts what is actually put into practice, exposing museums to a significant paradox. For instance, features becoming increasingly common in art institutions such as bullet-proof display cases, floor to ceiling glass walls and rope barriers set at great distances from objects are all measures implemented in the name of security and increased access to collections. However, a more theoretical examination of these measures in terms of their effect on space and experience reveals that the physical separation between object and viewer required for the implementation of many of these measures has as much to do with notions of exclusion as accessibility.

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<sup>57</sup> Keller, Steven R. 1989. 'Protecting Uncle John's Rembrandt', Professional paper presented at the annual seminar for Horizon Training Institute, Florida, 3.

<sup>58</sup> Keller 1989, 4.



### **III. Art Theft Literature**

Art theft sources fall largely into the following categories: fiction, media reports of notable thefts (and these largely confirmed to a prescribed formula), biographies of thieves, autobiographies of former detectives, films, and documentaries. An increasing number of databases exist on national and international levels that aim to recover missing objects by law enforcement and private organisations. There are a few books that look at art theft from a criminology perspective and these are the closest academic-related sources on the subject. One of the most problematic aspects of the literature is the way the topic of art theft is often sensationalised which frequently blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction. This survey tries to circumvent fictional and sensational sources in the hopes of quantifying the problem of art theft in terms of its impact on public art collections.

Parallel to the increasing concern for the vulnerability of art collections as evidenced by the expansion of museum security literature from the 1960s and the perceptible increase in value of works of art from this time as well, discourses specific to art theft begin to emerge. In the same way that museum security expanded as a field yet remained outside established discourses of museum practice, the problem of art theft never permeated these sources either. While it was widely acknowledged as a risk to collections such as fire, vandalism and accidental damage, the specific impact of theft on museums remained largely unaddressed. However, the subject of art theft did attract attention on an international scale and it is within this context that a body of literature emerges.

In the late 1950s the International Council of Museums (ICOM) set up the Commission for Security,

For the permanent study of problems relating to security against fire and theft at normal times and, in the event of war, of the technical aspects of the protection of collections, works of art and the buildings containing them.<sup>59</sup>

One of its objectives was to quantify the problem of art theft. It was agreed that ICOM would cooperate with Interpol in the distribution of a survey which would collect information from seventeen member states ‘particularly qualified owing to the importance of their museums’ on the protection of museums against theft.<sup>60</sup> The survey comprised the following questions:

- What burglar alarms were being used in their main museums.
- Whether these arrangements were considered adequate.
- Whether any better arrangements had been suggested by the museums and/or by local police authorities.
- What burglar alarms were most frequently used in their banks and jewellers’ stores.
- What burglar alarms had proved to be the best, i.e., the most sensitive, the safest and the most effective.
- Whether burglar alarms were directly connected to the police stations, i.e., whether a police station automatically received notice of the alarm.
- What alarms were, according to expert opinion, most suitable for use in museums: (a) for the general protection of buildings, exits, etc.; (b) for the protection of certain particularly valuable articles such as individual paintings or rare exhibits.

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<sup>59</sup> Noblecourt, André F. 1964. ‘The protection of museums against theft’, *Museum*, 17, 4, 184. This article is the published version of UNESCO CUA.64/11.80/AFSR, written by Noblecourt in Paris on 31 August 1963.

<sup>60</sup> Noblecourt 1964, 184. Member states included Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Greece, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Arab Republic, United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

- What practical suggestions the appropriate police services could make to museum guards in order to ensure even better protection against theft.<sup>61</sup>

On 1 July 1959 Interpol sent ICOM the results which were summarised in *Protecting Museums against Theft: Alarm Devices*. André Noblecourt's *The protection of museums against theft*, published by UNESCO in 1964, is an analysis of the conclusions of the aforementioned report.<sup>62</sup> In one of the earliest instances of its kind, Noblecourt's analysis broke down museum security into individual components, including a five stage process of detection, transmission, alarm, alert and counteraction. It includes a comprehensive list of detection and defence techniques and guidance on how to apply them, as well as a useful appendix of images of the latest security apparatuses.

The sixth ICOM General Conference (The Hague, 4 to 11 July 1962) also devoted considerable attention to the protection of museums against art theft. This international forum for art theft would see continued meetings and conferences throughout the decade that reflect an increasing concern for object safety. In September 1972, UNESCO organised a meeting of international organisations concerned with the security of cultural property in Brussels to explore the international consequences of an increasing number of thefts and the growing problem of the illicit trafficking of works of art. The following year, from 19 to 22 November 1973, another meeting in Brussels convened international experts to discuss the risks incurred by works of art, particularly from theft and illicit transfer of ownership. Furthermore, in May 1973 at St. Maximin in France, the French National

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<sup>61</sup> Noblecourt 1964, 184-85.

<sup>62</sup> Noblecourt 1964.

Committee for ICOM held a seminar on the security of museum objects and the activities of several international organisations such as Interpol.<sup>63</sup>

In a report by the Interpol General Secretariat to the organisation's forty-second General Assembly from 2 to 9 October 1973, the increase in the number of thefts of cultural property led the General Assembly, during its fortieth session in Ottawa, to vote a resolution that would, in the first instance, alert world public opinion and second, intensify the fight against thefts of art objects by collecting the maximum amount of information likely to help the police in their investigations. The first of these objectives was achieved by the publication of special notices grouping together particularly noteworthy stolen art objects, under the title, 'The Twelve Most Wanted Works of Art'.<sup>64</sup> This practice continues today.

For the second objective, the General Secretariat circulated two forms, known as the A.R.1 'Theft of Cultural Property – Request for Publication of International Notice' and A.R.2 'notification of Discovery of Stolen Art Objects'. They were intended to facilitate the work of the National Central Bureaux (NCBs) when reporting theft or discovery of a piece of cultural property, and also to standardise the information so that a working index could be established at the General Secretariat and a systematic study made of this area.<sup>65</sup> To outline the scope of the problem, on 14 August 1972 Interpol sent a questionnaire in the form of general, not statistical

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<sup>63</sup> UNESCO. 1974. 'Editorial', *Museum*, 26, 1, 3.

<sup>64</sup> UNESCO. 1974. 'Theft of Cultural Property: A Report by the Interpol General Secretariat to the Organisation's Forty-Second General Assembly', *Museum*, 26, 1, 4. Circular No. 4148/CRIGEN/OV.

<sup>65</sup> UNESCO. 1974. 'Theft of Cultural Property: A Report by the Interpol General Secretariat to the Organisation's Forty-Second General Assembly', *Museum*, 26, 1, 4. Circular No. 4148/CRIGEN/OV.

terms to all NCBs.<sup>66</sup> Questions were divided into three groups: thefts of cultural property, discovery of stolen objects, and international traffic.<sup>67</sup> The survey concluded that,

- (a) The great majority of thefts occur in public or private places where there is no system of technical protection or where the system of protection is insufficient;
- (b) cultural property of great artistic and commercial value is recovered more easily than items of lesser value which are more easily negotiated;
- (c) in the great majority of cases of cultural property which has been recovered, professionals in the art trade (second hand dealers, retailers, antique dealers, etc.) have, at one time or another, been concerned;
- (d) there is more international traffic in stolen art objects between neighbouring countries, while the market for such objects is generally located in large cities.

Several of the experts remarked that, among the perils threatening cultural property, vandalism must, in certain respects, be considered in a distinct way. While in fact certain measures for the protection of art works are effective for both theft and vandalism, thieves and vandals have profoundly different motivations. The result is that the mere fear of repression – which might have a certain effectiveness with regard to theft – is ineffective where vandalism is concerned. The preventive measures must be different, since they must aim at doing away with different kinds of motivations.<sup>68</sup>

From the 1970s onwards, apart from this international attention on art theft, there are no real academic or printed sources on the subject. When a theft of a well-known object occurs it is, however, widely reported in the media. It may be that this

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<sup>66</sup> UNESCO. 1974. 'Theft of Cultural Property: A Report by the Interpol General Secretariat to the Organisation's Forty-Second General Assembly', *Museum*, 26, 1, 4. Circular No. 4148/CRIGEN/OV. The thirty-seven countries that replied to the questionnaire were: Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Bermuda, Brazil, Burundi, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Gabon, Federal Republic of Germany, Hong Kong, Iceland, India, Iran, Iraq, Italy, Japan, Kuwait, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Mexico, Muscat and Oman, Netherlands, Peru, Senegal, Surinam, Sweden, Switzerland, Tunisia, United Kingdom, United States of America and Venezuela.

<sup>67</sup> UNESCO. 1974. 'Theft of Cultural Property: A Report by the Interpol General Secretariat to the Organisation's Forty-Second General Assembly', *Museum*, 26, 1, 4. Circular No. 4148/CRIGEN/OV.

<sup>68</sup> UNESCO. 1974. 'Theft of Cultural Property: A Report by the Interpol General Secretariat to the Organisation's Forty-Second General Assembly', *Museum*, 26, 1, 5. Circular No. 4148/CRIGEN/OV.

reporting in mainstream media fuelled the growing sensationalism of the subject which alienated it from the attention of art historians who might otherwise have engaged in the problems associated with theft. Furthermore, the media attention on an art theft always includes vast speculation over the value of the object which, as will be discussed later in the chapter, can be highly problematic for its recovery.

Following a spate of highly publicised thefts in the first decade of 2000, various books emerged that discussed these thefts in greater detail. Collectively, they present a picture of the underworld of art and of the detectives and various agencies involved in the tracking and recovery of stolen art. These books include Edward Dolnick's *The Rescue Artist: A true story of art, thieves, and the hunt for a missing masterpiece* (2005), Matthew Hart's *The Irish Game: A true story of crime and art* (2005) and Thomas McShane and Dary Matera's *Loot: Inside the World of Stolen Art* (2006).<sup>69</sup>

Written by historians, journalists and an undercover FBI operative respectively, each of these books focuses on the police operations during various thefts, but they all include the four separate robberies at Russborough House, County Wicklow, the large-scale theft at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston in 1990, the theft of *The Scream* from National Gallery of Oslo in 1994 and the theft of *The Scream* and *Madonna* from the Munch Museum in 2004 and the theft of Leonardo da Vinci's *Madonna with the Yarnwinder* from Drumlanrig Castle in 2003.

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<sup>69</sup>Dolnick, Edward. 2005. *The Rescue Artist: A true story of art, thieves, and the hunt for a missing masterpiece* (New York, Harper Collins); Hart, Matthew. 2005. *The Irish Game: A true story of crime and art* (London, Vintage) and McShane, Thomas and Dary Matera. 2006. *Loot: Inside the World of Stolen Art* (County Meath, Ireland, Maverick House).

They all also mention the roles played by art detectives Charley Hill and Richard Ellis who, as a result of their involvement in many of these cases even post-retirement, are continually interviewed.

Following on from these investigation-focused sources is the appearance in recent years of two texts which take the form of well-illustrated, factual but exceedingly brief summaries of important events in the history of art theft. Each written by journalists and each including a foreword penned by Julian Radcliffe, Chairman of the Art Loss Register, these include Simon Hout's *Museum of the Missing: A History of Art Theft* (2006) and Jonathan Webb's *Stolen: The Gallery of Missing Masterpieces* (2008).<sup>70</sup> It should be noted that there is no evidence of an academically-focused investigation of the history of art theft, and in the absence of such, the fractured, surface-scraping nature of these attempts is likely to continue.

A survey of literature on the topic of art theft further revealed that it was being studied within the field of criminology. Two significant contributions by criminologists include John Conklin (*Art Crime*, 1994) and Dr. Thomas D. Bazley (*Crimes of the Art World*, 2010).<sup>71</sup> Though not specific to art theft, these sources situate the subject within a broader context of art crime. As Conklin noted, his book addressed a topic that had 'so far escaped the attention of criminologists: crime that involves works of art'.<sup>72</sup> Similar in presentation, Bazley's book adds some more recent cases of art theft and largely picks up where Conklin left off more than a decade

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<sup>70</sup> Hout, Simon. 2006. *Museum of the Missing: A History of Art Theft* (New York, Sterling Publishing) and Webb, Jonathan. 2008. *Stolen: The Gallery of Missing Masterpieces* (London, Herbert Press).

<sup>71</sup> Conklin, John. 1994. *Art Crime* (Westport, CT, Praeger) and Bazley, Thomas D. 2010. *Crimes of the Art World* (Santa Barbara, CA, Praeger).

<sup>72</sup> Conklin 1994, preface.

earlier. Each clearly sets out the parameters in which criminal law can be applied to art crimes, discusses the motivations of criminals, as well as organising a typology of art crime as it applies to criminal law.

Other sources in the field of criminology and economics which relate to art theft include the following articles: William Lawrence, Laurie McGavin Bachmann and Michael von Stumm, 'Tracking Recent Trends in the International Market for Art Theft' (1988), Leah E. Eisen, 'The Missing Piece: A discussion of theft, statutes of limitations, and title disputes in the art world' (1991) and Paige L. Margules, 'International Art Theft and the Illegal Import and Export of Cultural Property: A study of relevant values, legislation, and solutions', (1999).<sup>73</sup>

In addition to the larger contributions by Conklin and Bazley, another two criminology articles stood out in their relevance to this thesis. In 2005, Dr. Simon Mackenzie, now based at the Scottish Centre for Crime and Justice Research at the University of Glasgow, wrote, 'Criminal and Victim Profiles in Art Theft: Opportunity and repeat victimization'.<sup>74</sup> Mackenzie's article updated (and upheld) many of Conklin's assertions from 1994. For instance, Conklin noted that a criminological analysis of art theft proposes that illicit transactions can be minimised by publicising stolen and illegally exported objects by investigating the origins of all

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<sup>73</sup> Lawrence, William, Laurie McGavin Bachmann and Michael von Stumm. 1988. 'Tracking Recent Trends in the International Market for Art Theft', *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 12:1, 51-72; Eisen, Leah E. 1991. 'The Missing Piece: A discussion of theft, statutes of limitations, and title disputes in the art world', *Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology*, 81:4, 1067-1101; Margules, Paige L. 1999. 'International Art Theft and the Illegal Import and Export of Cultural Property: A study of relevant values, legislation, and solutions', in *Transnational Crime*, Nikos Passas (ed.). 1999 (London, Ashgate).

<sup>74</sup> Mackenzie, Simon. 2005. 'Criminal and Victim Profiles in Art Theft: Motive, Opportunity and Repeat Victimisation', *Art Antiquity and Law*, 10:4, 353-370. This article was also presented at the Third Annual AXA Art Conference, 'Rogues Gallery: An Investigation Into Art Theft', British Museum, London, 1 November 2005.



pieces they consider for purchase.<sup>75</sup> Mackenzie takes up this point by arguing that the best protection the trade has against art theft is the trade itself. If artworks must re-enter the legitimate market to regain their full value, a legitimate dealer will at some point have to accept them. Thus, with organisations like the Art Loss Register (which will be detailed shortly) a mechanism is provided for dealers to undertake due diligence provenance research. These organisations operate on the premise that preventing objects from theft is difficult, but recovering them should, in theory, be easier.<sup>76</sup>

The second useful article was authored by R.T. Naylor, ‘The Underworld of Art’, (2008).<sup>77</sup> Of particular significance is how Naylor disputes many established myths about the relationship of art theft and organised crime. Naylor evidences how, despite what ‘sensationalist journalism’ suggests, one of the primary motivations for stealing art is to ransom it back to the insurance company as the ransom payment is likely to be less than the increase in insurance premiums and security upgrades.<sup>78</sup> Importantly, this negates the widely disseminated idea in the media and popular fiction that thieves steal art for personal motivations (such as a particular attachment to an object) or for use as collateral amongst organised criminal syndicates.

Sandy Nairne’s 2011 book *Art Theft and the Case of the Stolen Turners* was published towards the end of this thesis. Naylor’s work is not referenced in this book

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<sup>75</sup> Conklin 1994, 255.

<sup>76</sup> Mackenzie 2005, 370.

<sup>77</sup> Naylor, R.T. 2008. ‘The Underworld of Art’, *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 50, 263-91.

<sup>78</sup> Naylor 2008, 273-74. Though not mentioned in this source, the theft of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Madonna with the Yarnwinder* from the Duke of Buccleuch’s Drumlanrig Castle in 2003 fits this scenario. The painting was recovered in 2007 (a month after the Duke passed away) at a law firm in Glasgow. In 2010, three solicitors and two private investigators were charged with trying to extort money from the duke. They were acquitted, claiming they were attempting to return the painting in exchange for the appropriate reward.

which perhaps facilitates his argument that art theft is closely linked to organised crime.<sup>79</sup> Nairne writes an autobiographical account of his experience, as then-Director of Programmes at Tate Britain, with the theft of two works by J.M.W. Turner stolen whilst on loan to Frankfurt's Schirn Kunsthalle in 1994. The first part of the book is Nairne's personal account of the Turner recovery while the second puts the theft into a wider context, intended, as Nairne states, to debunk prevailing myths such as that of a 'gentleman thief' and reinforce its stronger connections with the drugs trade.<sup>80</sup> One of the particularly interesting aspects of the book is Nairne's discussion of the controversial reward paid by Tate in the recovery of the pictures.

In 1995, Tate accepted an insurance pay out of £24 million (£12 million per painting) from the Schirn Kunsthalle which meant that title to the paintings passed to the insurers with Tate retaining first option to purchase the paintings in the event they were recovered (also known as a buy back clause) for £24 million plus interest.<sup>81</sup> As the years passed without any prospects of recovery, and forbidden from using the insurance money at the exact time Tate was trying to raise £130 million for the legal title of the paintings (a risk on Tate's part considering the paintings might not be recovered or alternatively, were badly damaged). This was achieved at a cost of £8 million, rising to £12 million if the paintings were recovered within a year.

In 2000, Tate then paid £300,000 to a Frankfurt lawyer in exchange for two polaroid photographs of the Turners, as 'proof of life' that the lawyer was in contact

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<sup>79</sup> Nairne's selection of case studies including the 1974, 1986, 2001 and 2002 thefts from Russborough House in Ireland, the Gardner Museum in Boston, the National Gallery, Oslo and Munch Museum, Oslo – cases which are frequently associated with links to organised crime according to papers presented at the Third Annual AXA Art Conference (2005, British Museum) which will be discussed shortly.

<sup>80</sup> Nairne, Sandy. 2011. *Art Theft and the Case of the Stolen Turners* (London, Reaktion) 222-26.

<sup>81</sup> Nairne 2011, 63.

with those who held the paintings.<sup>82</sup> The Turners were eventually recovered with two payments totalling £3.2 million which went via the Frankfurt lawyer. Where or to whom this ‘information fee’ was directed is unknown. The controversy then arises over whether the use of rewards, paying for information and paying ransoms plays directly into the hands of criminals.

Moreover, two recent conferences further demonstrate an interdisciplinary interest in art theft. In November 2005, AXA Art held a two-day conference at the British Museum entitled, ‘Rogues Gallery: An Investigation Into Art Theft’.<sup>83</sup> This conference brought together museum directors, criminologists, loss adjusters, art investigators, insurance experts, conservation experts, victims of art crime (institutions as well as individuals) and interested scholars. Papers were presented from each of these disciplines which illustrated the broad implications of art theft.<sup>84</sup> Incidentally, one of the speakers at this conference was Richard Ellis, art detective and founder of Scotland Yard’s Art and Antiquities Unit who stated,

There can be a serious downside to the advertising of rewards, and their indiscriminate use has in the past acted only to encourage criminals to commit more thefts in the mistaken belief that the reward offered is little more than a price tag and that they will in effect be able to sell back the stolen art to the owners or to their insurers. There is a fine line between paying a genuine informant a reward for information given, and the use of a reward to buy back stolen property

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<sup>82</sup> Nairne 2011, 76-77.

<sup>83</sup> Third Annual AXA Art Conference, ‘Rogues Gallery: An Investigation Into Art Theft’, British Museum, London, 1-2 November 2005.

<sup>84</sup> I attended this conference with great interest and it was reconfirmed in discussion with many of the delegates that not only were the museological implications of art theft unexplored but that this study would have direct application to this kind of interdisciplinary forum.

and for the investigator it is an area that is legally fraught and requires great care.<sup>85</sup>

In the case of the Tate's recovered Turners, questions remain as to whether paying the Frankfurt lawyer for information leading to the recovery of the paintings (who passed it onto unknown sources) served to perpetuate a larger problem.<sup>86</sup>

The second conference was held at Cambridge University the following year. 'Art Theft: History, Prevention, Detection and Solution' considered how the academic study of art theft and its history could inform contemporary law enforcement and museum protection.<sup>87</sup> The conference assembled many of the same delegates as the AXA conference, but included more papers presented by art historians and law enforcement. However, the outcome of the conference seemed to slightly contradict its purpose. Instead of evidencing how academic art historians could assist law enforcement and security professionals, the conference actually highlighted just how distinct and specialised these areas are.

After the closing remarks discussion was opened to the wider audience where a leading architectural historian, the chairman of the Art Loss Register and the head of Scotland Yard's Arts and Antiquities Unit (who is now the Head of Security at the Victoria & Albert Museum) all concurred that although law enforcement and security

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<sup>85</sup> Ellis, Richard. 'Investigating Stolen Art: The Reason Why', paper presented at the Third Annual AXA Art Conference, *Rogues Gallery: An Investigation Into Art Theft*, British Museum, London, 1 November 2005.

<sup>86</sup> The Tate actually did very well out of the deal – the remainder of the initial insurance pay out was used to buy back legal title so that the paintings were returned to Tate who could freely spend its money on the Southwark storage facility for £7 million, major acquisitions totalling £2.8 million (Reynolds's *The Archers*, 1769, Turner's *The Blue Rigi*, 1842, and Rubens's oil sketch *The Apotheosis of King James I*, c.1629) leaving £17.2 million which is designated to its Collection Fund. The total of these three components is £27 million, more than the original £24 million pay-out due to collected interest.

<sup>87</sup> 'Art Theft: History, Prevention, Detection and Solution', Conference, Cambridge University, Cambridge, 9-11 June 2006.

professionals could always benefit from learning more about the objects they are dealing with, ‘policing should be left to police’.<sup>88</sup> In a way, this is a physical manifestation of the problem of the lack of intersection between the fields of art history, museum security and art theft.

Finally, a significant amount of databases of stolen art have emerged from various international organisations and law enforcement agencies. However, no single, centralised database exists which makes quantifying the problem of art theft problematic. In order for a theft to be measured, it must first be reported. Once reported, the way in which it is listed affects statistical analysis. For example, when a private residence is burgled, often the crime is reported simply as a burglary, even though a painting may have been stolen. Unless the owner of the painting makes a concerted effort to list the painting in various other databases, the theft remains unaccounted for in its own right.

Moreover, the lack of a centralised database suggests that the principles which inform the collection of data vary between these organisations. For instance, whilst there is inevitable cross-over for better-known objects, Interpol’s *Stolen Works of Art* directory does not include as many local listings as the FBI’s *National Stolen Art File* or the Metropolitan Police’s *London Stolen Arts Database*.<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, the Art Loss Register operates as the world’s largest private database, charging a fee to list a work of art as stolen, as well a fee to dealers and prospective purchasers for

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<sup>88</sup> Statement made by Detective Sergeant Vernon Rapley, Art and Antiquities Unit, Scotland Yard at the conference ‘Art Theft: History, Prevention, Detection and Solution’, Cambridge University, Cambridge, 11 June 2006.

<sup>89</sup> *Stolen Works of Art*, Interpol, <http://www.interpol.int/Crime-areas/Works-of-art/Works-of-art>; *National Stolen Art File (NSAF)*, Federal Bureau of Investigation <http://www.fbi.gov>; *London Stolen Arts Database (LSAD)*, Metropolitan Police Art and Antiquities Unit, <http://www.met.police.uk/artandantiques>.

the production of a certificate that is widely recognised in the international community as ‘due diligence’.<sup>90</sup> For clarity, a selection of the most prominent databases of stolen art is provided in Appendix 1.

## **The Vulnerability of Public Art Collections**

### **I . Increasing Value of Individual Objects**

Throughout history, art has always held significant value, but post-war economic prosperity has brought about new record-breaking trends in the value of individual objects. On 15 October 1958, seven paintings from the collection of Jakob Goldschmidt, a Berlin banker who had fled the Nazis before the war, went up for auction at Sotheby’s in London. It was an invitation-only, black tie affair that for the first time was both held in the evening and had a sales catalogue published with full-colour illustrations. During the entire twenty-one minutes it took to auction all seven lots, of particular interest was Paul Cézanne’s *Le garçon au gilet rouge* (1890) which was bought by Paul Mellon for £220,000. The price was more than five times the previous record for a painting sold at auction.

As previously mentioned, in 1961 the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York paid \$2.3 million for Rembrandt’s *Aristotle Contemplating a Bust of Homer*. The price set a record that more than doubled its predecessor and the sale even featured on the cover of *Time Magazine*<sup>91</sup> [Fig. 1.3]. Incidentally, seven companies shared the \$2.3 million risk for less than an hour in 1961 when they issued a policy

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<sup>90</sup> The Art Loss Register, <http://www.artloss.com>.

<sup>91</sup> 24 November 1961. *Time Magazine*, 78, 14.

to cover the transfer of the Rembrandt from the Parke-Bernet Galleries to the Metropolitan Museum of Art – a distance of seven blocks.<sup>92</sup>

Moreover, the Metropolitan Museum of Art's most expensive acquisition to date is the *Madonna and Child* by Duccio di Buoninsegna, purchased for between \$45 and \$50 million in November 2004. The history of the museum reflects a strong acquisitions tradition; they also bought Diego Velázquez's *Juan de Pareja* in 1970 for \$5.5 million and Jasper Johns's *White Flag* for more than \$20 million in 1998.<sup>93</sup>

The stock market, real estate and investment banking booms of the 1980s created hundreds of multimillionaires in search of the social respectability associated with owning works of art by important artists. As economists have noted, a combination of the decline of United States currency in 1985 and rapid economic growth in Japan and Western Europe sharply increased the demand for art bought and sold in dollars.<sup>94</sup> Art prices continued to soar, particularly in the 1980s and early 1990s, and again from 2004 to 2008 as evidenced by auction prices. In the autumn of 1989, between November 12 and December 15, no fewer than 228 works of art were sold for more than \$1 million each.<sup>95</sup> The peak culminated with the sale of Vincent van Gogh's *Portrait of Dr. Gachet*, 1890. On 15 May 1990, Christie's opened the bidding the portrait at \$20 million. From there, bids increased at \$1 million increments. Within five minutes, the portrait had sold for an astounding \$82.5

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<sup>92</sup> Esterow, Milton. 1973. *The Art Stealers* (New York: Macmillan), 34.

<sup>93</sup> Johns's *White Flag* had been the museum's most expensive acquisition until the purchase of the Duccio in 2004.

<sup>94</sup> Passell, Peter. 4 February 1990. 'Vincent Van Gogh, Meet Adam Smith', *The New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/02/04/arts/vincent-van-gogh-meet-adam-smith.html>.

<sup>95</sup> Watson, Peter. 7 December 2001. 'Under the Hammer', *The Guardian*. [Last accessed 12 August 2011]. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2001/dec/07/features11.g2>.

million. Two days later, Sotheby's auctioned off \$300 million worth of paintings in an hour. Christopher Burge, President of Christie's in the United States claimed,

We have moved into a whole new set of prices. A \$1 million sale was once thought scandalous and shocking – then it was \$2 million, then \$5 million, then \$40 million. The \$2 million Renoir has become a \$6 million picture. The \$6 million Renoir is now worth \$20 million, and the most important of his paintings would go for a lot more.<sup>96</sup>

These prices are a world apart from a time when Renoir, who in 1868, once traded a portrait for a pair of shoes.<sup>97</sup>

To put it into further perspective, in February 1990, *New York Times* economist Peter Passell claimed, 'Great Impressionist canvases, worth as much as Rolls Royce's in the 1970s, now trade at parity with Boeing 757s'.<sup>98</sup> In a progression from parity with shoes, to cars, to airplanes, values of individual objects have experienced a rapid and steady increase in recent decades. Furthermore, despite the recent economic climate, records continue to be broken. In November 2006, Hollywood entertainment magnate David Geffen reportedly sold Jackson Pollock's *No .5, 1948*, for \$140 million to David Martinez, a Mexican financier.<sup>99</sup> In 2006 Geffen also sold Jasper Johns's *False Start*, 1959, for \$80 million, and a Willem de Kooning, *Police Gazette*, 1953, for \$63 million. It is widely speculated that he sold a

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<sup>96</sup> Burge as quoted in, 'The Spectre of the Billion Dollar Show', 9 June 1988, *The Washington Post*.

<sup>97</sup> Vollard, Ambroise. 1990. *Renoir: An Intimate Record* (New York, Dover), 50.

<sup>98</sup> Passell, Peter. 4 February 1990. 'Vincent Van Gogh, Meet Adam Smith', *The New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/02/04/arts/vincent-van-gogh-meet-adam-smith.html>.

<sup>99</sup> Vogel, Carol, 2 November 2006. 'A Pollock Is Sold, Possibly for a Record Price', *New York Times*. [http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/02/arts/design/02drip.html?\\_r=1&adxnnl=1&ref=arts&adxnnlx=1163031599-revbGMuaIhdTP4qLonq8BA](http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/02/arts/design/02drip.html?_r=1&adxnnl=1&ref=arts&adxnnlx=1163031599-revbGMuaIhdTP4qLonq8BA).



number of works in his collection to raise money for a bid to purchase the *Los Angeles Times*.<sup>100</sup>

The following table represents the inflation-adjusted values of the most expensive paintings in the world, according to what they sold for at auction.<sup>101</sup>

Most Expensive Paintings Sold at Auction					
	Artist	Title	Adjusted Price (\$/£ millions)	Price at auction (\$/millions)	Date Sold
1.	Jackson Pollock	<i>No.5, 1948, 1948</i>	\$156.8/£101.6	\$140	November 2006
2.	Willem de Kooning	<i>Woman III, 1952-53</i>	\$154.0/£99.8	\$137.5	November 2006
3.	Gustav Klimt	<i>Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I, 1907</i>	\$150.2/£97.3	\$135	June 2006
4.	Vincent van Gogh	<i>Portrait of Dr Gachet, 1890</i>	\$144.1/£93.4	\$82.5	May 1990
5.	Pierre-Auguste Renoir	<i>Bal du moulin du la Galette, 1876</i>	\$136.4/£88.4	\$78.1	May 1990
6.	Pablo Picasso	<i>Garçon à la Pipe, 1904</i>	\$124.3/£80.5	\$104.2	May 2004
7.	Pablo Picasso	<i>Nude, Green Leaves and Bust, 1932</i>	\$110.2/£71.4	\$106.5	May 2010
8.	Vincent van Gogh	<i>Portrait of Joseph Roulin, 1889</i>	\$107 /£69.4	\$58 plus exchange of works*	August 1989

<sup>100</sup> Helmore, Edward. 7 November 2006. 'LA mogul seeks lively newspaper', *The First Post*. <http://www.thefirstpost.co.uk/1462/features/la-mogul-seeks-lively-newspaper>.

<sup>101</sup> The list initially included ten sales but the extension to sixteen more accurately reflects the boom experienced in 2004-2008 in which the initial price at auction shows an increase above some of the sales ranked further up the list because of their inflation-adjusted value. The list is ordered by Consumer Price Index inflation-adjusted values, current as of June 2011. The CPI was applied to the original price of the work sold at auction, and then converted to GBP for clarity. CPI Inflation rates were taken from the US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. June 2011. 'CPI Index'. Available here: <ftp://ftp.bls.gov/pub/special.requests/cpi/cpiiai.txt>.

9.	Pablo Picasso	<i>Dora Maar au Chat</i> , 1941	\$106.1/£68.8	\$95.2	May 2006
10.	Vincent van Gogh	<i>Irises</i> , 1889	\$105.1/£68.1	\$53.9	November 1987
11.	Andy Warhol	<i>Eight Elvises</i> , 1963	\$104.2/£67.5	\$100	October 2008
12.	Gustav Klimt	<i>Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer II</i> , 1912	\$98.5/£63.8	\$87.9	November 2006
13.	Vincent van Gogh	<i>Portrait de l'artiste sans barbe</i> , 1889	\$98.5/£63.8	\$71.5	November 1998
14.	Peter Paul Rubens	<i>Massacre of the Innocents</i> , 1611	\$96.1/£62.1	\$76.7 (£49.5)	July 2002
15.	Francis Bacon	<i>Triptych</i> , 1976	\$89.9/£58.3	\$86.3	May 2008
16.	Jasper Johns	<i>False Start</i> , 1959	\$89.5	\$80.0	June 2006
<p>*A complex deal was struck between the seller (private collection in Zurich, represented by two dealers) and the buyer (Museum of Modern Art, New York) whereby the MoMA transferred four paintings to the dealers which included Monet, <i>Corona (Water Lilies)</i>, c.1920, Renoir, <i>Reclining Nude</i>, 1902, Kandinsky, <i>Autumn Landscape, Murnau</i>, 1908, and Picasso, <i>Striped Bodice</i>, 1943. MoMA then sold a further three paintings to offset the cost of the Van Gogh: Giorgio de Chirico, <i>Evangelical Still Life</i>, 1916, Piet Mondrian, <i>Blue Façade (Composition 9)</i>, 1913-14, and Picasso, <i>Studio in a Painted Frame</i>, 1956. See Kimmelman, Michael. 9 October 1989. 'How the Modern Got the van Gogh'. <i>The New York Times</i>. [Last accessed 8 June 2011].  <a href="http://www.nytimes.com/1989/10/09/arts/how-the-modern-got-the-van-gogh.html?src=pm">http://www.nytimes.com/1989/10/09/arts/how-the-modern-got-the-van-gogh.html?src=pm</a>.</p>					

The table shows the aforementioned booms in the late 1980s and early 1990s as well as from 2004 to 2008. That some of the earlier records have remained on this list for so long speaks to the significant impact those sales achieved at the time. Interestingly, only one old-master painting, Rubens's *Massacre of the Innocents*, 1611, is on the list, whilst Van Gogh and Picasso feature prominently with four and three entries respectively.

The price these works fetch at auction frequently generates more dialogue than the works themselves. This draws a parallel with objects that have been stolen in that they become better known *because* they have been stolen. Perhaps the mystery over the location of these objects heightens public curiosity as often the most expensive works sold at auction are shuttled off to private collections, inaccessible to the public. Art theft can, in much the same way as a private collector, have the effect of selecting something for visual obscurity. This does not, however, support the romantic notion of gentleman-thieves who steal famous works of art for their own collections. In fact, there has never been any evidence of a ‘Dr. No’ figure.<sup>102</sup> Charlie Hill, the renowned ex-Scotland Yard art theft investigator who was responsible for securing the return of *The Scream* to the National Gallery, Oslo when it was first stolen in 1994 had some colourful remarks concerning the existence of a passionate art-loving thief. When asked at various times during an interview, Hill claimed the whole Dr. No scenario was ‘Hollywood horseshit’, ‘bollocks’, and ‘a complete unmitigated load of crap’. Furthermore, in Hill’s opinion, to broach the subject is to claim, ‘I’m an ignoramus and I’m here to waste your time’.<sup>103</sup> Regardless, the high value of art makes it appealing to collectors and thieves alike.

There seems to be an exclusivity associated with an object’s high price tag and something that has been stolen before. This may also transfer to other works by the artist of stolen objects. For instance, on 7 February 2006, eight works by Edvard

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<sup>102</sup> In the 1962 James Bond movie, *Dr. No*, Bond (Sean Connery) pauses to admire a portrait on an easel in Dr. No’s underwater lair – it is Goya’s *The Duke of Wellington*, which had been stolen from the National Gallery on 21 August 1961, only a few weeks before filming began. It was returned by thief Kempton Bunton (a retired truck driver) four years later.

<sup>103</sup> These comments were made by Hill to Edward Dolnick in an interview for his book. Dolnick 2005, 138.

Munch were put up for auction at Sotheby's in London. *Summer Day*, 1904-08, fetched £6,168,000, setting the highest price ever paid for a work by Munch. The paintings were sold by Fred Olsen, the wealthy Norwegian businessman who inherited a fortune from his family's shipping business and then built an empire of his own. The eight paintings sold for a total of approximately £17.1 million. In an interview regarding the sale, Olsen said that lately it has become more difficult for him to keep the paintings because of security concerns and the tax on net worth that Norway imposes on its citizens.<sup>104</sup> The sale occurred after the 2004 theft of the *The Scream* and *Madonna*, and just six months before they were recovered. It would seem highly coincidental that a record price was set for Munch at exactly this point in time; it more likely indicates that the theft contributed to an increase in the work's value.

## **II. Increase in Museum Attendance**

The globalisation of the art world and an increase in blockbuster exhibitions has led to unprecedented public enthusiasm for art collections which require institutions to accommodate large and diverse crowds. The pressure this puts on security is significant as the commotion and congestion associated with these large numbers creates an atmosphere where threats to object safety are highest. For instance, in 1999 the Royal Academy, London held the *Monet in the 20th Century* exhibition which remained open for 34 hours consecutively during its final weekend to give thousands of visitors a last chance to see the show. This was the first time a

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<sup>104</sup> 3 January 2006. 'Olsen to Sell Munch Collection', *Aftenposten*.  
<http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article1189704.ece>.

major art exhibition in the United Kingdom had stayed open throughout the night. In attempts to mitigate overcrowding, the Royal Academy admitted a limited number of people each hour, and still managed to set a record 8,200 visitors each day that paid £9 each to see eighty of Monet's later works from public and private collections around the world. The exhibition saw people clustered many feet deep for a look at the works [Fig. 1.4]. A Royal Academy spokeswoman said, 'We think it is an historic event, which reflects the 24-hour society we live in, and it provides people who haven't yet seen the exhibition with an opportunity to do so.'<sup>105</sup> Thus a perceptible change in the presentation of art exhibitions promotes a casual, 'drive-thru' approach to accessing cultural heritage.

The idea of a blockbuster exhibition, a term used with increasing frequency in the 1990s, suggests widespread and general public appeal by way of subject matter (particularly Impressionist shows), large crowds, and an admission price. It is this last aspect, which, when balanced against the management of overcrowding, museums find hardest to ignore. During the Monet exhibition, the publicity surrounding the exhibition boosted the fortunes of the Royal Academy immensely. In 1996 it had a £3 million deficit, but after the exhibition it was down to £500,000. Officials told the *BBC News* that they were pleased that the proceeds from the Monet exhibition went so far in helping to wipe out the rest of the debt.<sup>106</sup> Ticket sales, combined with the significant revenue collected from the ever-expanding museum

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<sup>105</sup> 18 April 1999. 'Entertainment Art: Around-the-clock closes Monet show', *BBC News*. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/low/entertainment/322634.stm>.

<sup>106</sup> 18 April 1999. 'Entertainment Art: Around-the-clock closes Monet show', *BBC News*. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/low/entertainment/322634.stm>.

gift shops, provide an attractive incentive for museums to continue the trend of large-scale exhibitions that have been so successful in drawing large crowds.

In *The Ephemeral Museum*, Francis Haskell put forward the idea that blockbuster exhibitions have become so important that they are taking over the traditional role of museums. The management of museums has had to respond to the measuring of success in terms of attendance figures, revenue and publicity. Haskell goes further to suggest that ‘the ideal modern director is likely to be someone well connected, with a flair for publicity’.<sup>107</sup> Museum directors are now judged by visitor numbers and publicity first and foremost, with scholarly knowledge no longer a prerequisite for museum directors, increasing the likelihood that blockbusters are in no risk of ceasing any time soon.

In a survey of attendance figures at twenty major museums conducted by *The Art Newspaper*, it was found that two-thirds experienced a clear increase in visitor numbers from 2006 to 2009.<sup>108</sup> It would seem that expensive blockbuster exhibitions can be relied upon to boost admissions. For instance, in Atlanta, the High Museum of Art’s \$18 million deal for a three-year revolving loan of art from the Louvre in Paris resulted in the museum’s highest attendance to date, and its most popular individual show was the 2009 *Louvre Atlanta: the Louvre and the Masterpiece*.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Haskell, Francis. 2000. *The Ephemeral Museum: Old Master Paintings and the Rise of The Exhibition* (New Haven and London, Yale University Press).

<sup>108</sup> Goldstein, Andrew. December 2009. ‘Museum attendance rises as the economy tumbles’, *The Art Newspaper*, 208. <http://www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/museum-attendance-rises-as-the-economy-tumbles/19840>.

<sup>109</sup> Goldstein 2009. <http://www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/museum-attendance-rises-as-the-economy-tumbles/19840>.

The increase in museum attendance held again for 2010 and includes free and paid admissions alike. The table below show the actual attendance figures for the top-ten-ranking institutions.

<b>Top 10 Art Museums</b> <b>Total Museum Attendance in 2010<sup>110</sup></b>	
8,500,000	Louvre, Paris
5,842,138	British Museum, London
5,216,988	Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
5,061,172	Tate Modern, London
4,954,914	National Gallery, London
4,775,114	National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.
3,131,238	Museum of Modern Art, New York
3,130,000	Centre Pompidou, Paris
3,067,909	National Museum of Korea, Seoul
2,985,510	Musée d'Orsay, Paris

This increase in visitors to museums, whilst essential for their survival and future development, places a significant strain on museum security. Though the above statistics suggest fiscal health, the ever-escalating costs associated with operations mean museums are not in a position to be turning people away. Thus, exhibitions are under increasing pressure to accommodate as many people as possible within a display space as well as to make every effort to add to the visitor

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<sup>110</sup> Pes, Javier and Emily Sharpe. April 2010. 'Japanese old master tops the attendance tree', *The Art Newspaper*, 223. <http://www.theartnewspaper.com/articles/Japanese-old-master-tops-the-attendance-tree/23408>.

experience by directing them to the cafés and shops where additional revenue is made. However, a well-attended exhibition increases the vulnerability of the museum. Objects are at greater risk of accidental damage when there are more people around, not to mention the distraction this poses to security warders who are required to invigilate a room (or two) whilst also fulfilling their role as the friendly, public face of the museum.

There is a general acceptance on behalf of the public in recent years that any ‘must-see’ blockbuster exhibition will be busy. Though visitors have come to expect a certain amount of crowding in these scenarios, institutions worry that a phenomenon called ‘gallery rage’ is on the rise. This was the reasoning behind the National Gallery’s decision to reduce the number of admissions from the 230 per half-hour slot it is allowed under health and safety rules to 180 for its *Leonardo da Vinci: Painter at the Court of Milan* exhibition which ran from 9 November 2011 to 5 February 2012.<sup>111</sup>

Timed-ticketing is a popular way for museums to mitigate overcrowding in hopes of evening out the peaks and troughs throughout the day. However, in most instances these tickets do not allow for readmission which prevents one from taking a break for lunch, etc., and later returning to the exhibition. It has been suggested that this reduction in time in fact contributes to the above-mentioned gallery rage. As a result of the overcrowding at Tate Modern’s *Gauguin: Maker of Myth* exhibition (30

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<sup>111</sup> Moss, Stephen. 9 May 2011. ‘Is the blockbuster exhibition dead?’, *The Guardian*. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/may/09/blockbuster-exhibition-national-leonardo>. Also see Dowling, Tim. 9 May 2011. ‘How to beat gallery rage’, *The Guardian*. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2011/may/09/how-to-beat-gallery-rage>.



September 2010 to 16 January 2011), art critic William Feaver echoed demands for smaller, calmer shows that allow artworks to be enjoyed as intended by the artist.

You get this sort of gallery rage because people can't just pop in for 10 minutes at a time and look at a few paintings. If you have come in from out of town or from abroad you have to save it all up for one visit and then you get a headache, and eye strain. The whole thing becomes a pilgrimage that is better relived later, looking at the catalogue at home.<sup>112</sup>

Described by some visitors as the art world equivalent of 'kettling' the often aggressive tactic employed by police to control riots and large crowds, in the Gauguin exhibition staff were required to move visitors through the rooms to make way for those in the next time-slot.<sup>113</sup> The diverse crowd of parents with pushchairs, groups of schoolchildren, art students and middle-aged art lovers all competed for elbow room to catch a glimpse of the artworks. The risk of damage to objects, already high simply due to the volume of people in an enclosed space, is further heightened when this group feels aggravated or pressured to move on.

Moreover, the concept of timed tickets means that the amount of time a visitor spends in an exhibition is dictated by the institution, not the individual.

### **III. Increase in Art Theft**

The 1960s not only represents an increase in the value of art objects but also a perceptible increase in the rates of art theft. Beginning with the theft of thirty paintings on 11 January 1960 from the villa of art dealer Armand Drouant in Villefranche, the Riviera was the target of various thieves (later referred to as the

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<sup>112</sup> Thorpe, Vanessa. 16 January 2011. "Gallery rage" mars the Tate's record-breaking Gauguin show', *The Guardian*. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/jan/16/gauguin-tate-modern-crowds>.

<sup>113</sup> Thorpe 2011. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/jan/16/gauguin-tate-modern-crowds>.

‘Marseilles Gang’) who stole 125 paintings worth about \$8 million over the next seventeen months.<sup>114</sup> On 15 July 1961 at the Musée de l’Annonciade in Saint-Tropez with the theft of fifty-seven important nineteenth and twentieth-century paintings by artists such as Matisse, Vuillard, Derain, Dufy, Utrillo, Signac, and Segonzac (who was also the curator of the museum at the time of the theft). The museum did not have any guards or burglar alarms, and was only insured against fire, not theft.<sup>115</sup> An article in *The New York Times* article stated,

The idea of thieves driving a truck up to a museum’s back door one night, loading it with 57 paintings and getting away without any more disturbance than the momentary disruption of the sleep of neighbouring citizens is absurd enough to be the opening scene of a movie. But it has actually happened...<sup>116</sup>

The theft occurred on Bastille Day, probably selected by the thieves so that any attention would be diverted elsewhere.

Three weeks after the Saint-Tropez theft, eight Cézannes worth \$2 million were stolen from the Pavillon de Vendôme in Aix-en-Provence. When asked if he was worried about a theft in light of the recent Saint-Tropez incident, the assistant mayor of Aix declared, ‘Indeed not. In Aix we have armed guards’.<sup>117</sup> Thirty hours later, the museum was robbed by the same gang who accomplished the Saint-Tropez heist. According to Esterow, the thieves were having a hard time selling the Saint-Tropez paintings due to their notoriety, and as they were uninsured, could not ransom

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<sup>114</sup> Esterow 1973, 66.

<sup>115</sup> Esterow 1973, 69.

<sup>116</sup> Esterow 1973, 69-70.

<sup>117</sup> Esterow 1973, 71.

them back to the insurance company. Thus, they decided the Cézanne exhibition, on loan to Aix, would be a better target as loan exhibitions were insured.<sup>118</sup>

On 13 August 1961, with just one night duty guard on the ground floor of the museum, thieves climbed a gate and entered through a second-floor side window. The security searchlights scanning the building served to highlight the windows that had been left open. One of the paintings hanging beside the open window was the Louvre's *The Card Players* and it was stolen along with seven others. This theft also occurred during the long weekend of the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin, a national holiday in France which provided the perfect distraction.

As the above cases support, as prices for art increased, so did theft, and many such collections were easy targets. Richard Ellis believes that it was inadequate security that made these paintings an easy target for professional thieves. Putting art theft into context, he considers that,

In the 1970s, bank robberies were fashionable but then security improved. In the 1980s and 1990s prices in the art market skyrocketed, but there was little or no security in place to prevent these kinds of thefts. The lack of security and increased value made famous works of art more attractive to criminals.<sup>119</sup>

As evidenced in the literature review, the 1960s witnessed a growing concern for the safety of objects, but security still remained outside of traditional discourses of museum practice and this exposed collections to greater risk. In recent years, a perceptible shift in the international environment has caused increasing global concern with issues of security, safety, protection and defense. These tightening and

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<sup>118</sup> Esterow 1973, 74.

<sup>119</sup> Isaac, Shauna. 1 December 2005. 'Stolen Masterpieces: the seedy world of the international art thief', *Art Quarterly*, 40 – 43.

fear-filled trends in social, economic and political spheres are now paralleled by museological changes and shifts in museological concerns, at a time when the art world is experiencing unprecedented growth. This fear is not without justification when examined in the context of the recent proliferation of art theft.

Accurately quantifying an increase in art theft is a problematic issue. As mentioned, the absence of a central art theft database means that uniform statistics do not exist. Thus many unsubstantiated claims saturate art theft discourse; they have become generally accepted by virtue of repetition. Throughout the literature, two common statistics are frequently cited. The first is that Interpol claims that the black market in art theft is the third most common form of trafficking, after drug trafficking and arms trafficking. To dispel this myth, Interpol states clearly, on its website, the following reply,

We do not possess any figures which would enable us to claim that trafficking in cultural property is the third or fourth most common form of trafficking, although this is frequently mentioned at international conferences and in the media.

In fact, it is very difficult to gain an exact idea of how many items of cultural property are stolen throughout the world and it is unlikely that there will ever be any accurate statistics. National statistics are often based on the circumstances of the theft (petty theft, theft by breaking and entering or armed robbery), rather than the type of object stolen.

An enhanced information exchange could assist INTERPOL in determining the importance as well as the trends and patterns of this type of crime.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Interpol. 'Is it true that trafficking in cultural property is the third most common form of trafficking, after drug trafficking and arms trafficking? Frequently Asked Questions'. *Works of Art: Interpol*. <http://www.interpol.int/Crime-areas/Works-of-art/Frequently-asked-questions>.

The second frequently cited statistic attributed to Interpol is that loss estimates from art crime annually range from \$5-6 billion. Interpol addresses this claim below.

It is not possible to put a figure on this type of crime, partly for the reasons mentioned above and partly because the value of an item of cultural property is not always the same in the country in which it was stolen and the destination country. Also, thefts of such property are sometimes not reported to the police because the money used to purchase them had not been declared for tax reasons or because it was the proceeds of criminal activity.

It is also impossible to assess the financial extent of the losses caused by clandestine archaeological excavations. Such excavations often only come to light when looted items appear on the international market. Illegal excavations destroy the scientific context of the single finds and seriously jeopardize future archaeological research of the sites.

Even without considering the economic impact behind the illicit traffic of cultural goods, it is important to consider the damage caused by this type of crime to civilizations and their history. The cultural heritage of a country constitutes its identity. A country that is deprived of its cultural heritage because it is being looted or stolen is a country that is losing its identity and every component that is linked to it: national belonging, patriotism or national pride.<sup>121</sup>

Just to complicate matters, the FBI openly supports this claim as can be seen on the Art Crime Team's webpage.

Art and cultural property crime—which includes theft, fraud, looting, and trafficking across state and international lines—is a looming criminal enterprise with estimated losses running as high as \$6 billion annually.<sup>122</sup>

Only a few sources, such as the aforementioned criminology texts by Mackenzie (2005) and Bazley (2010), do not reiterate these claims in order to substantiate an

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<sup>121</sup> Interpol. 'What is the cost of trafficking in cultural property? Frequently Asked Questions'. *Works of Art: Interpol*. <http://www.interpol.int/Crime-areas/Works-of-art/Frequently-asked-questions>.

<sup>122</sup> FBI Art Crime Team. 'Art Theft: It's like stealing history'. *Major Thefts: Art Theft*. [http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/investigate/vc\\_majorthefts/arttheft](http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/investigate/vc_majorthefts/arttheft).

increase in art theft and instead look to other ways of measuring the trend. With respect to the annual monetary loss from art crime, Bazley takes a conservative approach of creating a range of loss from \$1 to \$6 billion which allows for the figure to be high enough to warrant attention, but takes into consideration the contentious issue of ambiguous object values.<sup>123</sup>

Returning to the issue of measuring an increase in art theft, the Art Loss Register's reporting of theft statistics does show an increase in art theft, or at least the reporting thereof. In 1992, the database comprised only 20,000 items but this grew in size nearly ten times during its first decade.<sup>124</sup> As of 2009, the Art Loss Register conducts 300,000 searches annually with 10,000 *new* losses recorded each year.<sup>125</sup>

To link this to the threat posed to museums, the following data is useful. Fig. 1.5 is a table produced by the Art Loss Register organising thefts reported to its database according to the location of the crime [Fig. 1.5]. Accurate as of 2008, it shows that after to private residences (52%), most thefts occurred in museums (12%) and galleries (9%). Furthermore, of all thefts reported in 2008, Fig. 1.6 illustrates a breakdown of these by category [Fig. 1.6]. Pictures, defined here as paintings, drawings, prints and photographs are, by a wide margin, the most stolen type of object. The top ten figures from the table in Fig. 1.6 are converted into percentages below to facilitate comparison to the previous table.

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<sup>123</sup> Bazley 2010, 19.

<sup>124</sup> Houpt 2006, 8.

<sup>125</sup> Maneker, Marion. 23 April 2009. 'Art Loss Register Data Dump', *Art Market Monitor*. <http://artmarketmonitor.com/2009/04/23/art-loss-register-data-dump>.

<b>Items Registered on the Art Loss Register Database by Category<sup>126</sup></b>	
<b>Object Category</b>	<b>Percentage of Total Reports</b>
Pictures	43
Timepieces	12.2
Sculpture	10.7
Silver	6
Ceramics	5.2
Jewelry	5.2
Furniture	4
Objects of art	3.9
Books	2.3
Textiles	1.5

Owing to the types of objects found in museums, the statistics support a significant risk posed to the pictures contained in museums. With respect to the category of ‘pictures’ in the table above, the Art Loss Register also tracks loss reports by artist. Whilst it does not support an increase in theft *per se*, it is useful for museums to know which objects are most targeted by thieves. The following is a list of the top ten artists whose work is stolen compiled from data up until the end of 2008.

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<sup>126</sup> Maneker 2009. <http://artmarketmonitor.com/2009/04/23/art-loss-register-data-dump>.

<b>Top Ten Stolen Artists in All Media<sup>127</sup></b>	
Pablo Picasso	699
Salvador Dali	396
Joan Miro	390
Marc Chagall	361
Albrecht Durer	212
Pierre-Auguste Renoir	192
Andy Warhol	183
Rembrandt van Rijn	181
Peter Paul Rubens	147
Henri Matisse	138

In 2005, the FBI's Art Crime Team published a list of 'Top 10 Art Crimes' on their website. Since then, the list has remained largely unchanged apart from the removal of the theft of *The Scream* and *Madonna* upon their recovery in 2006 as well as the Duke of Buccleuch's *Madonna with the Yarnwinder*, recovered in 2007. These entries were replaced with thefts from the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia and the robbery of the Bührle Collection in Zurich. The crimes are listed in the table below.

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<sup>127</sup> Maneker 2009. <http://artmarketmonitor.com/2009/04/23/art-loss-register-data-dump>.



Top 10 Art Crimes <sup>128</sup>			
Rank	Theft	Stolen Object(s)	Date
1.	Iraq National Museum and archaeological sites	Between 7,000-10,000 artifacts looted. Among the missing are the diorite statue of Entemena and almost 5,000 cylinder seals.	March-April 2003
2.	Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum	Vermeer, <i>The Concert</i> , Rembrandt, <i>A Lady and Gentleman In Black</i> , Rembrandt, <i>The Storm on the Sea of Galilee</i> , Rembrandt, <i>Self Portrait</i> , Govaert Flinck, <i>Landscape with an Obelisk</i> , Chinese Bronze Beaker or 'Ku', Degas, <i>La Sortie du Pleage</i> , Degas, <i>Cortege aux environs de Florence</i> , Degas, <i>Three Mounted Jockeys</i> , Degas, <i>Program for an artistic soiree</i> , Degas, <i>Program for an artistic soiree</i> , Manet, <i>Chez Tortoni</i> , Bronze eagle, <i>Finial</i>	March 1990
3.	Oratory of San Lorenzo, Palermo	Caravaggio, <i>Nativity with San Lorenzo and San Francesco</i>	October 1969
4.	New York City apartment of Erica Morini, a noted concert violinist	Davidoff-Morini Stradivarius	October 1995
5.	Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam	Van Gogh, <i>View of the Sea at Scheveningen</i> and <i>Congregation Leaving the Reformed Church in Nuenen</i>	December 2002
6.	Ashmolean Museum, Oxford	Cézanne, <i>View of Auvers-sur-Oise</i>	January 1999
7.	Edenhurst Gallery, West Hollywood, CA	Maxfield Parrish, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney Murals, Panels 3-A and 3-B	July 2002
8.	Museum Chacara do Céu,	Dali, <i>Two Balconies</i> , Matisse, <i>Luxembourg Garden</i> , Picasso, <i>Dance</i> , Monet, <i>Marine</i>	February 2006

<sup>128</sup> FBI Art Crime Team. 'FBI Top Ten Art Crimes', *Major Thefts: Art Theft*.  
<http://www.fbi.gov/hq/cid/arttheft/arttheft.htm>.

	Rio de Janeiro		
9.	Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia	Frans Van Mieris, <i>A Cavalier</i>	June 2007
10.	E.G. Bührle Collection, Zurich	Paul Cézanne, <i>Boy in the Red Vest</i> and Edgar Degas, <i>Count Lepic and His Daughters</i>	February 2008

Though not supporting a statistical increase in theft, the above list does reflect the vulnerability of museums to theft in that seven (or eight if you include a commercial gallery) of the FBI's top ten art crimes were from museums. Eric Ives, director of the FBI's major theft division, puts the recovery rate for artwork stolen in the United States at five percent. The international recovery rate is believed to be slightly higher at seven to ten percent.<sup>129</sup> An estimated five per cent of all art in circulation has been stolen and laundered at some time in its history. Of all the art that has disappeared from museums, churches and private homes over the last two decades, only one in twelve of these items have been returned through police action or reward payments.<sup>130</sup>

Balanced against low recovery rates, the significant financial cost of upgrading security adds to the problems facing museums. It is simply too expensive for most collections to adequately insure and secure their objects. Acknowledging this problem, Richard Ellis thinks most public galleries have reasonably good security, but they can not necessarily afford to upgrade it further. 'The problem with

<sup>129</sup> Goldenberg, Suzanne. 17 November 2005. 'FBI Names Its Most-Wanted Stolen Works of Art', *The Guardian*. <http://arts.guardian.co.uk/arttheft/story/0,,1644682,00.html>.

<sup>130</sup> Gage, Deborah. 1 November 2005. 'Art Thefts Through History', Conference paper presented at 'Rogues Gallery: An Investigation into Art Theft,' *AXA Art Conference*, British Museum, London.

security is that it's expensive with no obvious financial return. Currently there is not a great deal of money available to most galleries...If someone is determined to steal something they will'.<sup>131</sup>

Unfortunately for museums, as an increase in armed robbery indicates, thieves have had this figured out for some time. It seems that as security measures are improved, the level of violence employed during a theft also increases. The widespread use of advanced security systems makes it harder for thieves to use non-violent subterfuge as a method for obtaining entry and departure, and armed robbery becomes the surest way to leave the premises with objects in hand. For instance, in 2003 a group of thieves took a sledgehammer to display cases containing art deco jewellery at the Antwerp Diamond Museum. Another team of thieves drove a sports utility vehicle through a reinforced window at the Rothschild's family home at Waddesdon Manor in June 2003, escaping within four minutes with over one hundred eighteenth-century gold boxes. Perhaps one of the most extreme examples of the proliferation of violent art crime occurred in May 2003, when thieves slit the throat of a security guard during a robbery at Antigua's Museum of Colonial Art.

Furthermore, the theft of *The Scream* and *Madonna* was the first armed art robbery in Norway, a country where even police do not routinely carry weapons as fewer than ten officers have been killed on the job since 1945.<sup>132</sup> During the theft, thieves ordered staff and visitors to the floor with their guns. As will be discussed in

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<sup>131</sup> Branigan, Tania, Rebecca Allison, and David Ward. 28 April 2003. 'Meticulous raid on gallery sees three masterpieces vanish without trace', *The Guardian*.  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/arts/arttheft/story/0,13883,1034341,00.html>.

<sup>132</sup> 23 August 2004. 'Munch art theft stirs debate on museum security', *USA Today*.  
[www.usatoday.com/news/world/2004-08-23-scream-norway\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2004-08-23-scream-norway_x.htm).

greater detail in the case study, the prevention of anyone obtaining entry with a weapon was one of the main reasons for the installation of the airport-like baggage scanners and metal detectors now in use at the Munch Museum.

This situation fosters mounting pressure on arts institutions to protect their collections from the risk of theft. As a result, increasing levels of security are being introduced and, as established earlier in the chapter, the effect of these measures upon museums is an area that falls outside of traditional discourses. Thus, a case is established for the investigation of the museological implications of the features that are being installed as a result of this growing problem.



## Chapter 2: Louvre, Paris



‘Steal the *Mona Lisa*? You might as well pretend that one could steal the towers of the cathedral of Notre Dame’.

Théophile Homolle, Director of the Louvre, 1910

Instantly dominating global headlines, the theft of the *Mona Lisa* on 21 August 1911 became the first major art theft from a public collection in modern times. Selected as a case study for this reason, the theft will be used as an academic investigation of the impact of art theft on traditional viewing conditions. Locating the theft within the early twentieth-century Parisian landscape, this chapter begins with

an examination of how the empty space on the wall came to represent the extension of criminality into museum space. The transformation of the museum into a crime scene, a setting wholly at odds with its historical situation, contributed to the dismantling of conventions based upon exclusivity.

The theft made the museum relevant to a wider audience because it resonated with popular contemporary crime narratives and local anxieties. Barriers were eroded by the prolific and irreverent parody of the theft in the streets and the scathing attack on the institution in newspapers which significantly devalued the Louvre's reputation. This interrogation of museum practice exposed operations previously exclusive to the domain of a select few to a wider public and fuelled a growing sense of national indignation at the crime. Moreover, the appropriation of the theft by mass culture produced an unprecedented interest in the *Mona Lisa* which not only foreshadowed its future iconic status but generated a legacy of problems associated with the delicate balance between the accessibility and display of valuable objects. Like a stain upon the pristine walls of the museum, the void where the painting once hung became a symbol of criminality and institutional anxiety that presented a direct challenge to established modes of display.

While the theft dismantled many social barriers and forced a reconsideration of institutional hierarchies and value judgements, the security measures taken upon the recovery of the painting in 1913 produced restrictive viewing conditions that progressively reintroduced the exclusivity of the object to museum space. By mapping a history of the display of the *Mona Lisa*, an exploration of the degree to which security measures are a reflection of the exclusivity and value of an object is

undertaken. Of particular interest is how these measures, introduced with the expressed intention of expanding access to the painting, have in fact been based upon principles that increase the separation between object and viewer producing a significant paradox between museum rhetoric and practice.

### **Source material**

The case study will draw together material relating to the theft including novels, films, and documentaries, as well as photographs, postcards and songs. These ephemeral sources situate the theft firmly within early twentieth-century popular culture and will be examined for the impact they had upon the public reception of the theft and for their contribution to the dismantling of established conventions in museum practice. Contemporaneously, the theft dominated headlines around the world and an unprecedented attack on the Louvre as an institution was played out in printed media. This material exposes the national indignation that fuelled the interrogation of institutional practice. By focusing particularly on the role of security, these accounts brought previously private details about professional practice into the public realm, producing a devastating image of institutional incompetence at the Louvre.

The recovery of the painting in 1913 entrenched the iconic status of the *Mona Lisa* which had been largely driven by mass culture in the wake of the theft, exposing a complex set of problems for the continued display of the painting. In an assessment of these issues, the chapter introduces the problematic notion that security measures are a reflection of value, a major premise of this thesis, and uses visual sources to



map a history of the display of the *Mona Lisa* so that the effect of the theft and subsequent security measures upon museum space can be quantified. Details have been assimilated from contemporary reports, photographs and attendance figures on the few instances that the painting left the Louvre (during wars and trips abroad) and they reveal much about the site specificity of security measures and the delicate balance between accessibility and display which rose to new heights in the late twentieth century. Culminating in an analysis of the painting's new setting at the Louvre, the chapter presents a case for how *Mona Lisa* is the archetypal example of an object orphaned by its display following the refurbishment of the Salle des États in 2005.

### **Literature**

The line between fact and fiction is frequently blurred in art theft discourse. This analysis will circumvent the histrionic narratives that dominate the literature surrounding theft as they tend to focus primarily on the criminological aspects of the crime (perpetrator and motive) producing sensationalised accounts of loosely-established fact. That the painting was missing for two years after it was stolen, and the lack of any credible leads as to its whereabouts, fuelled outlandish theories in the press making its recovery in 1913 surprising news. Perhaps more surprising was that the perpetrator was not the refined gentleman-thief the public had come to expect, nor were his motives for stealing the *Mona Lisa* based upon a crime of passion or inspired criminal enterprise.

Vincenzo Peruggia was arrested after clumsily attempting to sell the painting to an art dealer in Florence in December 1913. As will be detailed in the subsequent section, he hid overnight in the Louvre, donned workman's clothing the next morning and, due to his previous employment at the museum, was able to easily remove the painting from its frame and exit the building unnoticed. At his trial, Peruggia confessed his actions and claimed that he had been trying to return the *Mona Lisa* to Italy after (mistakenly) thinking that it had been looted from Italy by Napoleon.<sup>133</sup> For the press, Peruggia was a disappointment. He was simplistic rather than sophisticated; lacking the charm and charisma that would have made him as famous as his crime. Trying to match the thief to the crime might explain why so many accounts of the theft tend to sensationalise the straightforward framework surrounding the theft which has led to significant misunderstandings within the literature.

For example, following the painting's return in 1913 nothing of significance was written about the theft until 1932, when an article appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* by journalist Karl Decker. It suggested an affluent Argentine conman by the name of Marqués Eduardo de Valfierno hired Vincenzo Peruggia to steal the *Mona Lisa* so that he could sell forged copies to overseas buyers. With the publicity that the theft was sure to draw, each buyer would in turn think they possessed the original and keep silent about their illicit acquisition. Decker claimed to have heard the story from Valfierno in 1913 but had promised not to publish anything until after

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<sup>133</sup> Peruggia stated this motive at his trial where he was sentenced to thirteen months in prison, but released upon appeal after serving seven months.

his death.<sup>134</sup> Problematically, Valfiero's existence has never been confirmed. No evidence of the alleged buyers or forgeries has ever surfaced, and when asked later in life, Peruggia denying knowing Valfierno. That the story resurfaces frequently in the literature is likely because it is just that – a good story.<sup>135</sup> It could be suggested that the lack of a more 'exciting' motive behind such a famous theft fosters a need to sensationalise the whole story.

One of the most frequently-cited accounts of the theft falls into this trap. In *The Day They Stole the Mona Lisa* (1981) Reit recounts the 'true' story of the theft of the *Mona Lisa* by using contemporary sources.<sup>136</sup> With a preference for the dramatic and anecdotal, Reit fills in the gaps outlined in Decker's article. His selection of material makes it very easy to take the existence of Valfierno as a given. For example, in a 2006 monograph of Leonardo da Vinci, Frank Zöllner asserts:

Qualitatively good copies of the *Mona Lisa* are found in the Louvre in Paris, the Prado in Madrid, in the Liverpool Art Gallery, in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, in the Hermitage in St Petersburg and in the Oslo Museum of Art. Further copies in smaller museums and private collections deserve more detailed study, particularly since numerous copies were made between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and in connection with the theft of the *Mona Lisa* in 1911 (Reit, 1981).<sup>137</sup>

<sup>134</sup> Decker, Karl. 25 June 1932. 'Why and How the *Mona Lisa* was Stolen', *Saturday Evening Post*.

<sup>135</sup> The majority of narrative sources in the literature maintain this theory, including Esterow, Milton. 1966. *The Art Stealers* (New York: Macmillan), McMullen, Roy. 1975. *Mona Lisa: The Picture and the Myth* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company), Reit, Seymour. 1981. *The Day they Stole the Mona Lisa* (Robert Hale, London), Page, Martin. 1984. *The Man Who Stole the Mona Lisa* (John Curley, South Yarmouth, Massachusetts), Greenhalgh, Chris. 1994. *Stealing the Mona Lisa* (Bloodaxe, Newcastle), Noah, Robert. 1998. *The Man Who Stole the Mona Lisa* (New York, St Martin's Press), Hoobler, Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler. 2009. *The Crimes of Paris: A True Story of Murder, Theft, and Detection* (New York, Little, Brown and Company), Scotti, R.A. 2009. *Vanished Smile: The Mysterious Theft of Mona Lisa* (New York, Knopf).

<sup>136</sup> This case study has found Reit (1981) to be the most frequently-cited reference in literature referring to the theft. Somewhat surprisingly, Reit was an author of children's books, and along with cartoonist Joe Oriolo, was the creator of the character 'Casper the Friendly Ghost'.

<sup>137</sup> Zöllner 2006, 194.

Zöllner's assumption above is based upon the claim that Valfierno hired a forger named Yves Chaudron to produce six copies of the *Mona Lisa* for his overseas buyers, as recounted by 'Valfierno' to Decker in their interview in 1913.<sup>138</sup> Such instances highlight the problematic nature of historical narrative in a subject largely lacking in scholarly attention.

The Decker theory faded into obscurity probably owing to the inability to credit the claims and it was not until 1966 that the first book about the theft was published. *The Art Stealers* was written by Milton Esterow, current editor of ARTnews and former *New York Times* reporter.<sup>139</sup> The publication date suggests a renewed interest in the theft as a result of the international exhibition of the *Mona Lisa* in Washington D.C. and New York in 1963, on the initiative of French Culture Minister André Malraux and President of the United States John F. Kennedy (or more appropriately, his wife Jacqueline Kennedy).<sup>140</sup> The next book came almost a decade later by Roy McMullen, *Mona Lisa: The Picture and the Myth* (1975), followed by aforementioned Seymour Reit, *The Day They Stole the Mona Lisa* (1981).<sup>141</sup> Other sources (though also fairly sensationalised accounts) include Martin Page, *The Man Who Stole the Mona Lisa* (1984), Chris Greenhalgh, *Stealing the Mona Lisa* (1994), and Robert Noah, *The Man Who Stole the Mona Lisa* (1998).<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Decker, 1932.

<sup>139</sup> Esterow 1966.

<sup>140</sup> Lebovics, Herman. 1999. *Mona Lisa's Escort: André Malraux and the Reinvention of French Culture* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press). Lebovics 1999 examines the relationship between the *Mona Lisa* and French national identity and the detailed account of the painting's loan to the US in 1963 is particularly useful for this chapter's interest in the painting's security measures outside the Louvre.

<sup>141</sup> McMullen 1975 and Reit 1981.

<sup>142</sup> Page 1984, Greenhalgh 1994, and Noah, 1998.

The most reliable source was found to be Jérôme Coignard, *Une femme disparaît: Le vol de La Joconde au Louvre en 1911* (1990) as it mapped the theft according to well-documented facts without glamourising the narrative.<sup>143</sup> Other useful sources included historian Donald Sassoon's *Becoming Mona Lisa: The Making of a Global Icon* (2001) which presents an important collection of historical, sociological, political and artistic sources relating to the *Mona Lisa*, with a concentration on popular culture and advertising as he sets out to ask why the *Mona Lisa* is the world's most famous painting.<sup>144</sup> Comprised almost entirely of illustrations, Sassoon's *Leonardo and the Mona Lisa: The History of a Painting Told in Pictures* (2006), presents a rich visual history of the figures and events outlined in his previous book.<sup>145</sup> Both Sassoon 2001 and 2006 relegate the theft to a chapter within a larger body of work for obvious reasons but the application of visual material to a well-documented history parallels the motivations behind this thesis and provided some interesting images to work from.

More recent literature seems to have fallen back into sensational narrative, including Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler, *The Crimes of Paris: A True Story of Murder, Theft, and Detection* (2009) and R.A. Scotti, *Vanished Smile: The Mysterious Theft of Mona Lisa* (2009).<sup>146</sup> A documentary entitled *The Missing Piece:*

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<sup>143</sup> Coignard, Jérôme. 1990. *On a volé la Joconde* (Paris, Adam Biro).

<sup>144</sup> Sassoon, Donald. 2001. *Becoming Mona Lisa: The Making of a Global Icon* (New York, Harcourt).

The book takes the assumption of the *Mona Lisa* as the world's most famous painting as a starting point to produce a historical timeline of events that contribute to its iconic status (p.3).

<sup>145</sup> Sassoon, Donald. 2006. *Leonardo and the Mona Lisa Story: The History of a Painting Told in Pictures* (Toronto, Madison).

<sup>146</sup> Hoobler and Hoobler 2009 and Scotti 2009.

*Vincenzo Peruggia and the Unthinkable theft of the Mona Lisa* (2011) is set to be released to coincide with the one hundredth anniversary of the theft.<sup>147</sup>

Surprisingly, throughout these texts and across all other literature, the unique display of the *Mona Lisa* and its overt security has never been commented upon in a significant way. In academic literature, in the rare instances where the theft or security of the *Mona Lisa* is mentioned it is exceedingly brief. For instance, in a seminal work on museum ritual, Carol Duncan and Allan Wallach (1980) refer to the *Mona Lisa* as being enshrined behind a bulletproof enclosure but do not elaborate on the concept.

The Salle des Etats, the largest and most central, holds the Louvre's most important Italian old masters – Raphael, Titian, Veronese, Correggio and, above all, Leonardo, whose *Mona Lisa*, enshrined in a bullet proof case, is the focus of the room if not of the entire museum.<sup>148</sup>

Though the application of notions such as ritual, worship, icon, and pilgrimage to museum space is largely established in academic discourse, the significant way in which these are reproduced and reinforced by security measures is not. A considerable factor in the spatial organisation of museums, it will be suggested that security shapes and dictates a great deal of the 'ritual script' in museums.

In the last decade, three texts have emerged that have particular application to this subject. In *Stealing the Mona Lisa: What art stops us from seeing* (2002), psychoanalyst Darian Leader uses the theft to examine why we look at art, and what

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<sup>147</sup> Maderios, Joe, *The Missing Piece: Vincenzo Peruggia and the Unthinkable theft of the Mona Lisa* (documentary), release date August 2011 [<http://www.monalisamissing.com>]. Written and directed by Joe Medeiros, a writer for *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* in the United States, the documentary seeks to uncover Peruggia's motive for stealing the *Mona Lisa* by revisiting archival material, retracing his known movements, and interviewing criminologists, detectives, journalists, art historians, and even Peruggia's descendants.

<sup>148</sup> Duncan, Carol and Allan Wallach. 1980. 'The Universal Survey Museum', *Art History* 3:4, 448-49.

we are hoping to find.<sup>149</sup> He suggests that the way people flocked to the empty space at the Louvre reveals something about human curiosity that is linked to an interest in what we cannot see. In one of the only accounts that examines the empty space on the wall at the Louvre from a psychological perspective, Leader opens a discussion around the theories of Freud and Lacan to explore the separation between an object and the space it occupies which is a vital concept for this thesis. In *The Delirious Museum: A Journey from the Louvre to Las Vegas* (2005), Calum Storrie views the museum as both a repository of the artefacts of the past and a continuation of the city street in the present.<sup>150</sup> He looks at the blurred boundaries between museums and the cities around them, and this concept will be expanded and applied to the transformation of the museum space into a crime scene that matched the expectations of a public eagerly consuming fictional tales of urban criminality, such as the *Arsène Lupin* and *Fantômas* serial crime novels. Furthermore, in 'Crime stories in the historical urban landscape: narrating the theft of the *Mona Lisa*' (2006), Aaron Freundschuh illustrates the link between crime storytelling and the spatial tensions of everyday life.<sup>151</sup> Balanced against the enormous body of written accounts, he suggests that Parisians re-fashioned mass press versions of the theft to fit their own local concerns such as the mistrust of Americans and interests in conspiracy theories and crimes of passion.

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<sup>149</sup> Leader, Darian. 2002. *Stealing the Mona Lisa: What Art Stops Us From Seeing* (London, Faber and Faber).

<sup>150</sup> Storrie, Calum. 2005. *The Delirious Museum: A journey from the Louvre to Las Vegas* (London, I. B. Tauris).

<sup>151</sup> Freundschuh, Aaron. 2006. 'Crime stories in the historical urban landscape: narrating the theft of the *Mona Lisa*', *Urban History*, 33, 2: 274-292.

By locating the theft within the early twentieth-century urban landscape the case study will use the empty space on the wall as a point of departure for the expansion of contemporary notions of museum space and the exclusive conventions that dictated modes of display, how these conventions came to be dismantled by the theft, and, paradoxically, reintroduced by security.

### **From Museum to Crime Scene: Urban Criminality at the Louvre**

While not an example of street crime, the theft of the *Mona Lisa* takes place within a context of anxiety around it. Much of the Louvre's response to the theft, and the security measures employed at the time, were informed by police responses to perceived dangers on the streets of Paris. On many levels the discovery of the theft transformed museum space into a site of criminality and this alteration played a pivotal role in negating spatial and social preconceptions embedded within the site.

This process began in the first hours following the theft as newspaper reports emerged which conflated traditional images of the Salon Carré (the room in which the *Mona Lisa* hung) and floor plans of the museum with narratives of the theft. The result was the production of a new space that became analogous with the dangerous city streets, subverted convention and became more accessible to marginalised visitors. The transformation occurred most obviously by the physical closure of the museum for an official investigation which included the interrogation of museum staff and the undertaking of the latest forensic analyses.

On the morning of 22 August 1911, artist Louis Béroud (1852 – 1930) returned to the Salon Carré where he had reportedly been preparing sketches for a study of an



elegant model arranging her hair in the reflection of the recently-glazed *Mona Lisa*.<sup>152</sup> Though earlier that year he had completed *Mona Lisa au Louvre*, 1911, [Fig. 2.1], this new composition was never realised. Instead of finding the *Mona Lisa*, he encountered a bare wall with four iron pegs that once held the painting [Fig. 2.2]. Upon alerting a guard who assumed the painting had been taken to the photographer's studio, Bérout was told to return later. When the painting was still missing and it was confirmed that it was not with the photographer, a series of staff searches within the museum commenced. Proving unsuccessful, the *Mona Lisa* was officially declared missing and the police were called.

News of the theft broke at 17:00 on 22 August in an extra edition of *Le Temps*, the leading morning newspaper. Scant with detail, the article announced that the painting was missing and that the Louvre was conducting an investigation with police. It noted that the museum had closed to the public at 14:45 and that detectives had told the crowd gathering outside that the closure was due to a broken water pipe.<sup>153</sup> The news was not yet front-page material, perhaps due to its late insertion and the fragmentary nature of the information at that early point. The small announcement appeared as the last article on the last page. The newspaper claimed that the disappearance of the *Mona Lisa* must have been due to some 'joker', expressing doubt over the possibility of gaining any commercial advantage from the sale of a painting so universally known.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Though not hugely significant, I have been unable to find confirmation of the nature of the piece Bérout was working on at the time of the theft. The suggestion of a model arranging her hair in the reflection of the recent glazing is repeated (without an original source) in Leader 2002, 28, Storrie 2005, 9 and Coignard 2010, 12.

<sup>153</sup> "'La Joconde' a disparue du Louvre', *Le Temps*, 23 August, 1911.

<sup>154</sup> "'La Joconde' a disparue du Louvre', *Le Temps*, 23 August, 1911.

At 17:30, Georges Bénédict, curator of the Egyptian collection and acting director of the Louvre while Théophile Homolle was on holiday, made an official statement.

*La Joconde* is gone. So far we have not the slightest clue as to the perpetrator of the crime...Yesterday was cleaning day and the museum was closed to the public. Thus no one noticed the absence of the picture. This morning the guard of the Salon Carré, where the painting hung, noticed its disappearance and attributed it to the negligence of the official photographer, who often takes it up to his own studio and returns it the next morning before the gates open to the public...The frame bore no marks of violence. The thief or thieves evidently took plenty of time for the operation of dismounting the picture, and discarded the frame as too bulky. How he or they came or left is a mystery.<sup>155</sup>

The news of the theft reverberated throughout the city and crowds gathered to await further information [Fig. 2.3]. ‘All day long anxious crowds have been stationed in front of the Louvre...public feeling has turned from incredulity to the greatest indignation’.<sup>156</sup>

Upon closure to the public, a wide scale search of the Louvre commenced. Sixty detectives were assigned to the investigation and when they discovered the frame and protective glass box discarded on a staircase that led to a cloakroom, it became obvious that the painting had been stolen.<sup>157</sup> One of the first people questioned by Louis Lépine, Police Prefect of the Seine, was the head of the museum’s maintenance department. He said that on his way through the Salon Carré, at about 07:20, he paused at the *Mona Lisa* with two of his workmen and stated, ‘This is the most valuable picture in the world. They say it is worth a million and a

<sup>155</sup> ‘“La Gioconda” is Stolen in Paris’, *The New York Times*, 23 August 1911.

<sup>156</sup> ‘60 Detectives Seek Stolen “Mona Lisa”’, *The New York Times*, 24 August 1911.

<sup>157</sup> ‘60 Detectives Seek Stolen “Mona Lisa”’, *The New York Times*, 24 August 1911.

half francs’.<sup>158</sup> On their return, at 08:35, the maintenance man noticed that the picture was no longer there. He said to his colleagues, ‘Ho, ho. They have taken it away for fear we would steal it.’<sup>159</sup> This anecdote is often repeated in theft discourses because it establishes a timeline for the disappearance of the painting. It is also the first time the empty space on the wall is mentioned.

A preliminary demarcation of space was enhanced by the public awaiting news outside, while the museum was sealed off as a crime scene for the official investigation conducted behind closed doors. The police recalled all members of staff to the Louvre and subjected them to rigorous questioning while detectives combed the museum for clues. French criminologist Alphonse Bertillon (1853-1914) was brought in to aid the investigation. Bertillon was a famous biometrics researcher who introduced the systemisation of criminal identification to police procedure. Bertillon’s method (*Bertillonage*) involved anthropometry, a system of identification that relies on the unchanging character of certain measurements of parts of the human body. His book, *Identification anthropométrique* (1893) outlined nine measurements to be taken of body parts that remain fairly constant throughout adult life<sup>160</sup> [Fig. 2.4]. The method quickly spread throughout Europe and was taken up in London by 1894, eventually only to be replaced by Bertillon’s other methods of forensic investigation, which by 1910 included mug shots, fingerprinting and crime scene photography.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> ‘Find “Mona Lisa”, Arrest Robber’, *The New York Times*, 13 December 1913. Also quoted by Esterow 1973, 113, using slightly different wording.

<sup>159</sup> Esterow 1973, 113-4.

<sup>160</sup> Bertillon, Alphonse. 1893. *Identification anthropométrique* (Melun, Imprimerie Administrative).

<sup>161</sup> Bertillon was a prosecutory witness in the Dreyfus Affair in 1894, testifying as a handwriting expert that Alfred Dreyfus wrote the incriminating documents that leaked French military secrets to

These technological measures were applied to the space at the Louvre and the public was kept abreast of the progress. On 24 August *The New York Times* reported,

M. Bertillon to-day took a number of photographs of the frame and the paper packed around the frame to prevent dust from penetrating between the frame and the painting, pieces of which were found strewn about close to the spot where the frame was discovered. These will be examined under the microscope for finger prints.<sup>162</sup>

While detectives interviewed members of staff, they were fingerprinted and photographed by Bertillon using his ‘speaking portraits’, or mug-shot technique which introduced the frontal and profile views still employed today. Classes teaching this technique were in progress in 1911 [Fig. 2.5]. With respect to fingerprinting, in these early stages of forensic science only the right hand was printed. Thus, when a left thumb print was discovered on the glass from the frame of the *Mona Lisa*, it could not be matched to any of the fingerprints held on file by the police, nor from the prints Bertillon took of Louvre employees exposing a major flaw in the process. One of the men hired to install the glass on the *Mona Lisa* in January 1911 was Vincenzo Peruggia. As a contracted employee, his details were registered at the Louvre and he would have known how to remove the painting from its frame. When he stole it on 21 August 1911, he left his fingerprints on the glass. Furthermore, since he had been previously arrested in 1908 (attempted robbery) and 1909 (illegal possession of weapons) his fingerprints were already on police file.<sup>163</sup> Had police

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the German Embassy in Paris. Dreyfus was sentenced to life in prison (solitary confinement) on Devil’s Island, French Guiana. When new evidence emerged contradicting Dreyfus’s guilt and public support of his innocence grew (fostered by Émile Zola’s open letter in January 1898, *J’accuse*), the conviction was overturned and Dreyfus was reinstated as a major in the French Army in 1906. Bertillon was still highly regarded after the trial, but his method based on anthropometry began to be seen to be overly-complicated. Anthropometry was eventually supplanted by fingerprinting, of which Bertillon was the undisputed expert.

<sup>162</sup> ‘60 Detectives Seek Stolen “Mona Lisa”’. *The New York Times*, 24 August 1911.

<sup>163</sup> Esterow 1975, 161.

procedure included printing both hands, the case might have been solved immediately.<sup>164</sup>

While the closure of the museum heightened curiosity over what was happening inside, newspapers printed crudely altered images of the space which foreshadowed the spatial imbalance that would be encountered at the scene. On 23 August, *Le Petit Parisien*, like almost every other newspaper, ran a headline of the theft that included a reproduction of the *Mona Lisa*. Unlike other papers however, an image appeared at the bottom of the article showing a photograph of the Salon Carré with a white 'x' marked below the *Mona Lisa* hanging on the wall [Fig. 2.6]. The image was taken from a Louvre postcard dated c.1910 [Fig. 2.7]. Portraits of Leonardo da Vinci and Théophile Homolle are dramatically superimposed on either side of the image. This photograph marked with the crude white 'x' is one of the earliest visual sources in which museum space was represented as anything other than serene. On the surface, the mark looks like an act of vandalism; a stain on the wall. Since this was only the day after the theft was discovered, no other photographs of the museum space were in circulation, but this simple gesture is a visual expression of the 'mark of shame' that would soon be displayed to the public.<sup>165</sup> The stark contrast of the white mark on the dark photograph disrupts the expectation of

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<sup>164</sup> In fact, when the *Mona Lisa* was recovered and the link between Peruggia and the fingerprint on the glass was established, the defects in Bertillon's indexing system were exposed and the Paris Prefect of Police sought the assistance of Scotland Yard's fingerprinting methods so he could reorganise the French system. See 'Go To Florence for the "Mona Lisa"', *The New York Times*, 18 December 1913. Bertillon died two months later (13 February 1914).

<sup>165</sup> As will be discussed later, Max Brod described the empty space on the wall of the Louvre as a 'mark of shame' when he visited it on 10 September 1911. Zischler, Hanns. 2003. *Kafka Goes to the Movies*, Susan H. Gillespie, transl. (Chicago, University of Chicago Press), 47.

visual order in the photograph; a precursor to the confrontation that would be produced by the absence of the painting in the Salon Carré.

Newspapers also frequently published a floor plan of the Louvre in their initial reports of the theft. In the above *Le Petit Parisien* article, the location of the *Mona Lisa* is marked on a crudely-drawn floor plan with an 'x' in the Salon Carré [Fig. 2.8]. Another floor plan was published in *L'Illustration* on 2 September 1911 and here, sketching the thief's presumed route [Fig. 2.9]. In the wake of the theft, the floor plan which was a feature common to guidebooks and familiar to museum visitors was altered to represent the escape route of a criminal – a further demonstration of criminality in the museum environment. Thus, the closure of the museum for a police investigation, the attention aroused by a shocking headline and a lack of information, and the dissemination of these crudely altered images heightened curiosity and contributed to the erosion of spatial preconceptions even before the empty space on the wall was put on display to the public.

The permutation of criminality into the museum space, though manifested by the theft, was preceded by a growing concern for museum security that was linked to street gangs, in particular those known as *les apaches* who plagued Parisian law enforcement at the turn of the century. An example of urban anxiety seeping into the museum environment can be found in a security memorandum from 1906, where the Louvre's Chief of Security suggested that the museum worker be trained in the combat sport of jiu-jitsu, an idea borrowed from Prefect of Police Lépine, who had recently ordered that police officers be thus trained as part of the war on the *les*

*apaches*.<sup>166</sup> The presence of *les apaches* fostered a widespread fear for public safety, as reported in the *National Police Gazette*, 21 October 1905.

That the Apaches are brutal trouble hunters is seen by their interminable fights among themselves, while the columns of the Paris daily papers testify without cease to their willing use of the knife on passing citizens of the night.<sup>167</sup>

Among others, in particular the cover pages from *Le Petit Journal* of 20 October 1907 and 19 July 1908 illustrate the scope of the war between police and *les apaches*.<sup>168</sup> The former, entitled ‘The Apaches are the plague of Paris’, claims that the streets are inundated with 30,000 apaches while the police only number 8,000<sup>169</sup> [Fig. 2.10]. The latter, ‘Prison does not scare the Apaches’, indicates the depth of the problem facing law enforcement [Fig. 2.11]. Historically associated with the neighbourhoods of Belleville, La Bastille, La Villette and Montmartre, *les apaches* (named after the alleged savagery of the Native American Apache tribes) attacked middle class victims on the streets of Paris with alarming frequency. Their methods were violent and included the ‘Apache revolver’, a pinfire cartridge revolver with no barrel, fold-over brass knuckles as a handgrip, and a folding knife mounted underneath the revolver drum for use as a stabbing weapon [Fig. 2.12] and the famous *coup du père François*, a tactic by which a victim was stalked by several Apaches before being garroted from behind, strangled against the attackers back. This did not always lead to fatality, thus the preference for the tactic to escape a

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<sup>166</sup> ‘Incidents et vols au musée du Louvre avant la disparition de la Joconde et mesures de sécurité prises à leur suite, 18 juin 1874-11 octobre 1911’ (1906 security memorandum), (Archives Nationales, Paris), F21 4481.

Also, Police Prefect Lépine’s announcement in *Le Matin*, 28 October 1905.

‘The Apaches of Paris’. 21 October 1905. *National Police Gazette*, 3. Reprinted in *The Journal of Manly Arts*, January 2005.

<sup>168</sup> ‘The Apaches are the plague of Paris’, *Le Petit Journal*, 20 October 1907, and ‘Prison does not scare the Apaches’, *Le Petit Journal*, 19 July 1908.

<sup>169</sup> ‘The Apaches are the plague of Paris’, *Le Petit Journal*, 20 October 1907.

murder charge. While the victim was garroted, one Apache searched the victim for valuables, while another served as a lookout [Fig. 2.13].

In 1908, Louvre director Homolle issued an internal memorandum on security asking whether museums attendants would be more effective if they were issued revolvers, batons and whistles.<sup>170</sup> Although the measures were not taken, the perceived need for museum staff to require the same equipment as the police on the Parisian streets points to an institutional anxiety over the security of its collections in the wake of prolific street crime and an increasingly diverse viewing public. It further suggests that the museum saw this public as a conflation of museum patrons and would-be criminals. This perception was not entirely unfounded, as the previous year (1907) saw the Louvre suffer two acts of vandalism and took the decision to glaze some of its more important paintings, including the *Mona Lisa*.

The first attack occurred on 17 July 1907 when a grocer's clerk named Alphonse Cousin slashed Nicolas Poussin's *Le Déluge*, 1660-64, with a carving knife [Fig. 2.14]. Cousin had recently fallen on hard times and when his parents refused to help him he decided to exact his revenge by embarrassing them. When arrested he claimed, 'Tomorrow all the people of the village, who hold my parents in high estimation, will learn that their only son is in prison, and that is all I wanted'.<sup>171</sup> He also stated that the selection of the painting was random; that it would do just as well as any other masterpiece.

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<sup>170</sup> 'Incidents et vols au muse du Louvre avant la disparition de la Joconde et mesures de sécurité prises à leur suite, 18 juin 1874-11 octobre 1911' security memorandum dated 1906, (Archives Nationales, Paris), F21 4481.

<sup>171</sup> 'Slashed Poussin's Deluge: Vandalism at Paris Louvre Committed by a Grocer's Clerk', *The New York Times*, 28 July 1907.



The second incident involved damage sustained to Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's *Pope Pius VII in the Sistine Chapel*, 1814 [Fig. 2.15]. On 12 September 1907, a woman named Valentine Contrel slashed the painting with a pair of scissors. It was reported that, 'the face of the pontiff had been nearly cut out. The head of a Cardinal had been severed, and the faces of two other personages badly mutilated.'<sup>172</sup> Her motivation for the crime was to do something that would get her arrested, so that she could go to jail as she was tired of working. In a statement made to the police, she claimed,

It is a shame to see so much money invested in dead things like those at the Louvre collections when so many poor devils like myself starve because they cannot find work. I have just spoiled a picture at the Louvre in order to be arrested... I came back to Paris and was determined to get 'run in'. The papers lately mentioned that a man had slashed a Louvre picture. That is what I must do to avenge myself. At 3 o'clock in the afternoon I went into the Louvre. As there was a crowd in all the galleries, I waited until 4:30 when the visitors began to leave, and went to the unfrequented Ingres room, where I chose the Sistine Chapel picture because it was not under glass. I had no intention of making a demonstration against religion. With a small pair of scissors I first tried to cut the Pope's eyes away, but the canvas was too thick, and I had to content myself with slashing the figure and several others. I had to stop several times for fear of attracting the notice of the visitors. A young woman was copying near me, but she was too intent upon her work to notice me. When I thought I had done enough damage to be arrested, I went away and came here to give myself in charge. As a matter of fact, this is not the first outrage of this kind that I have committed. Some months ago, in a room of the Jardin de Plantes Museum, I smashed a glass case containing a fine butterfly, which I destroyed. I was arrested, but the police let me go out of pity for the wretched penury I was in.<sup>173</sup>

Even though Contrel turned herself in following the vandalism, it took her several minutes to convince the police that she had actually committed the crime. She finally

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<sup>172</sup> 'Girl Demolished Louvre Painting: Slashes Ingres's "Sistine Chapel" and Gives Herself Up to the Police', *The New York Times*, 13 September 1907.

<sup>173</sup> 'Louvre Vandal Sentenced: Woman Who Slashed Ingres Goes to Jail for Six Months'. *The New York Times*, 4 October 1907.

had to bring the police to the painting and show them the damage to get them to listen. She was sentenced to six months in jail. Of resonance was that the reason behind her choice of painting was because it was not under glass as opposed to anything to do with the subject matter. It left the Louvre with little alternative but to begin a wide scale campaign to glaze its more ‘important’ pictures.

The Louvre’s decision to glaze paintings caused widespread public protest, even abroad. Of the glazing of the *Mona Lisa*, *The New York Times* reported in 1907,

Putting glass over the great masterpiece of Italian art has caused dismay to art-lovers, who declare that the effect of the picture is ruined by the false lights and reflections. An effort will be made to have the glass removed, and a special guard posted near the picture instead.<sup>174</sup>

That the glass was removed as a result of public dissatisfaction with the display is surprising; particularly since it meant the Louvre capitulated to public opinion on a matter of security. It suggests that there was a higher value placed upon the notion of an unmediated viewing experience; that proximity to a painting was important. This assumption was built into historical viewing conditions and is represented in many images of museum interiors until the introduction of more restrictive barriers in the twentieth century. For example, in François-Auguste Biard’s *Closing Time*, 1847, a gentleman with a monocle examines a painting at extremely close proximity signalling an adherence to established conventions amidst a bustling and socially diverse crowd [Fig. 2.16].

The posting of a guard by the *Mona Lisa* was thought to mitigate vandalism, as yet the only proven threat to the collection. However, perhaps under a growing climate of fear in the museum paralleled by threats to public safety on the streets, the

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<sup>174</sup> ‘“Mona Lisa” Under Glass: Famous Picture in the Louvre Now Protected Against Vandals’. *The New York Times*, 13 October 1907.

glazing was later reinstalled on a number of paintings, including the *Mona Lisa*, in October 1910. The job was completed by January 1911.<sup>175</sup> The eventual re-glazing of the *Mona Lisa* in the face of widespread public dissatisfaction with the decision is an early example of the problematic balance between accessibility and display. It also foregrounds a pattern that will be established later in this thesis of how new and unprecedented alterations to the display of an object are initially met with reluctance. The reintroduction of glazing may reflect a mistrust of its public on behalf of the institution, primarily aimed at preventing accidental damage by those who did not conduct themselves accordingly or the infrequent but severe acts of vandalism. As for the perceived likelihood of the theft of the *Mona Lisa*, less than a year before the theft director Théophile Homolle claimed, ‘Steal the *Mona Lisa*? You might as well pretend that one could steal the towers of the cathedral of Notre Dame’.<sup>176</sup>

### **Empty Space: The exhibition of art theft and the dismantling of convention**

As a respected institution, the museum was forced to endure a very public and humiliating investigation. The museum’s shortcomings in terms of operations and security were laid bare before the public and the results were disastrous. However, the effects of this notoriety were paradoxical; while the reputation of the museum suffered, its attendance increased. The scathing attack in mass culture had brought the Louvre to the attention of a larger, more socially diverse audience. Significantly contributing to this phenomenon was the decision to reopen the museum on 29 August 1911, a week after the theft. With the reputation of the Louvre

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<sup>175</sup> Esterow 1975, 162.

<sup>176</sup> Théophile Homolle, Director of the Louvre, 1910, as quoted in McMullen 1975, 198.

in tatters as a result of the mass print attack and widespread irreverent parody of the theft, the exclusivity surrounding the museum evaporated. Emboldened crowds flocked to the Salon Carré, a space now more similar to the crime scenes found in the sensational exploits of the popular Fantômas or Arsène Lupin novels [Fig. 2.17]. Newspapers advertised the unique condition of the reopening. Even *The New York Times* ran the headline, 'See Bare Space in Louvre'. The article reported, 'Every one entering the museum went to the Salon Carré to stare at the vacant place on the wall where the masterpiece had hung and to discuss the theft'.<sup>177</sup> Thus it transpired that the theft, represented by the vacant wall, produced an audience. Rather unintentionally, the Louvre had successfully mounted the first exhibition of art theft.

The void was transformed into an exhibit, an object to behold. The striking juxtaposition of the void against the once-harmonious pictorial hang unbalanced spatial preconceptions while the broad social base of the new audience negated the cultural conventions and social proprieties historically embedded within the site. In this fluid state, long-held assumptions about the function of object, viewer and space were reconsidered. For example, the exhibition of the void invalidated preconceptions of the space that were based upon the stability and security of the Louvre.

As places, museums such as the Louvre provide a sense of stability and security that also is conferred upon their imperial collections and prized objects. Representations of stability and security, then, are conflated with socio-aesthetic values and cultural assumptions about permanence, worth, legitimacy, and quality. The implication is that the prized possessions inside the secure and stable museum are more enduring, valuable, legitimate, and of higher quality than those outside it.<sup>178</sup>

<sup>177</sup> 'See Bare Space in Louvre: Public Admitted for First Time Since "Mona Lisa" Disappeared', *The New York Times*, 30 August 1911.

<sup>178</sup> Jeffers, Carol. Spring 2003. 'Museum as Process', *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 37, 1: 110.

The presence of the void meant that the Louvre had failed in its institutional obligation and symbolised the loss of constancy previously thought inherent. The suspension of convention enabled the public, especially a marginalised section, to visit the museum for reasons other than ‘permanence, worth, legitimacy, and quality’.

Sigmund Freud’s early ideas about scopophilia, the pleasure in looking that revolves around the notion of exclusion, may further indicate why people flocked to the Louvre to see the void on display. As Freud suggests, the progressive concealment of the body, which goes along with civilization, keeps sexual curiosity awake. This curiosity seeks to complete the sexual object by revealing its hidden parts.<sup>179</sup> In other words, the visual world becomes interesting to us as we search for concealed elements; visual curiosity is organised around something hidden. Heightened by incredulity at the crime, a lack of progress in the investigation and the closure of the museum, scopophilia permeated public consciousness and this contributed to an increase in attendance to see the empty space.

[The crowds] didn’t look at the other pictures. They contemplated at length the dusty space where the divine *Mona Lisa* had smiled only the week before. And feverishly they took notes. It was even more interesting for them than if the *Gioconda* had been in its place.<sup>180</sup>

Psychoanalyst Darian Leader picks up upon this idea in *Stealing the Mona Lisa: What art stops us from seeing* (2002). In one of the only intellectual discussions of the empty space, Leader suggests that from a Lacanian perspective the crowds that

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<sup>179</sup> Freud, Sigmund. 1905. ‘Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality’, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, James Strachey, Ed. and trans., London, Hogarth Press, 1961, vol. VII, p.156.

<sup>180</sup> *Le Matin*, 30 August 1911. For other similar reports see *Le Petit Parisien*, 30 August 1911 and *Le Figaro*, 5 January 1914.

flocked to the Louvre after the theft of the *Mona Lisa* demonstrated the true function of the work of art: to evoke the empty place of the Thing, the gap between the artwork and the place it occupies.<sup>181</sup> As will be shown later in the chapter, the separation between an object and the space it occupies is of central importance to a discussion of the implications of art theft as it is within this space, the ‘gap’, that many museological problems occur.

The museum aesthetic traditionally set the tone of the museum experience. ‘The success of the Louvre as outward symbol of Republican culture required the adoption of display conventions and value hierarchies recognized by connoisseurs throughout Europe’.<sup>182</sup> Implied within this aesthetic were assumptions based upon sufficient education and prior knowledge to identify, discuss or copy these valuable objects. In a modernist twist, juxtaposed against the conventional museum setting at the Louvre, nothingness and absence stimulated discussion. The theft was a topic of conversation that cut across social and intellectual classes because it conflated the subjects of crime and high culture, making it as relevant for residents of crime-riddled working class neighbourhoods as those from wealthier bourgeois quarters. Higher education, an artistic background, or even a general interest in art were not prerequisites for aesthetic discourses when there was ‘nothing to see’ and prevailing discussions focussed on the crime, perpetrators and motives.

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<sup>181</sup> Leader 2002, 66. On ‘the Thing’ see Chapter XVIII in Lacan, Jacques. 1992. *The Seminar, Book VII. The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959–1960*, Jacques-Alain Miller, ed., Dennis Porter, transl. (London, Routledge).

<sup>182</sup> McClellan, Andrew. 1999. *Inventing the Louvre: Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Berkeley, University of California Press), 10-11.

The exhibition of the void did also draw an avant-garde audience who perhaps sought more intellectual stimulation from the theft. For instance, on 9 September 1911 Franz Kafka and Max Brod visited the Louvre.

Once in Paris, they waste no time in seeking out the site of the crime, in order, in the company of numerous other curious visitors, to stare at the empty space on the wall of the Louvre where the famous lady had hung until August 21, 1911.<sup>183</sup>

The empty space draws a parallel with the ‘invisible sights’ that Kafka wrote about in his diary the previous week, referring to the names of various landmarks that a taxi driver had called out as he drove them through Munich. Due to their position in the car, he and Brod were barely able to see anything.

Rain, fast drive (20 min.), perspective of a basement apartment, driver calls out the names of the invisible sights, the tires hiss on the asphalt like the apparatus in the cinematograph, the most distinct thing: the uncurtained windows of the Four Seasons, the reflection of the streetlights in the asphalt as in a river.<sup>184</sup>

Owing to the way Kafka’s language evokes the dark, fragmented, and fast-paced projection (in an early cinemagraphic sense) of the urban environment, Calum Storrie’s model of the museum as a continuation of the city street in the present becomes an appropriate metaphor for Kafka’s tour of invisible city sights which is brought into the Louvre. He proposes that the melancholic atmosphere was not confined to the walls of the Louvre and that it flowed out into the city.<sup>185</sup> Earlier in this chapter it was suggested that the criminality of the streets flowed *into* the Louvre with the theft, but it now becomes useful to think of this current as multidirectional to better understand the connection between the museum and its urban environment.

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<sup>183</sup> Zischler 2003, 47.

<sup>184</sup> Zischler 2003, 35.

<sup>185</sup> Storrie 2005, 15.

In short, the theft negated the exclusive barriers that held the museum to fixed conventions; this new and unbalanced state allowed for a more fluid relationship between museum and street.

For instance, the melancholy encountered at the empty space seeped into the tone of the newspapers. A few weeks after reopening, one headline read, ‘Various Clues to the Robbery of the “Mona Lisa”, but Paris Fears That the Picture is Lost Forever’.<sup>186</sup> It seemed to parallel the reflective atmosphere that was developing in the Salon Carré. Whilst the prolific reporting fuelled the devaluation of the museum’s reputation out with museum walls, the sombre behaviour of the visitors to the empty space in the Salon Carré points to a collective sense of loss. In at least one instance, flowers were laid before the empty space on the wall.<sup>187</sup> Like flowers left at the scene of an accident or tragedy, the empty space at the Louvre became a site of pilgrimage and mourning.

Within the Salon Carré, unprecedented crowds converged on the empty space as if paying respect to the deceased and this behaviour is another way of reinforcing the metaphor of the museum as temple; a site of pilgrimage and worship, and host to sacred relics. Via the void on the wall, the *Mona Lisa* enjoyed an iconic status. Outside the museum however, the theft was the source of endless mockery in films, cabarets, songs, and postcards which lampooned both the ‘masterpiece’ and the institution. Every humiliating detail of the simplistic nature of the theft and

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<sup>186</sup> ‘Various Clues to the Robbery of the “Mona Lisa”, but Paris Fears That the Picture is Lost Forever’, *The New York Times*, 17 September 1911.

<sup>187</sup> ‘La Reouverture du Louvre: Des nombreux visiteurs on defile hier devant l'emplacement de la Joconde’, *Le Petit Parisien*, 30 August 1911.



inadequate security was front-page news and this translated into a substantial institutional attack beyond the walls of the Louvre.

### **Mass print culture and the interrogation of museum practice**

The scale of the attack on the Louvre in the newspapers needs to be understood within the context of the early twentieth-century popular press and the conventions it was often employed to work against. In the mid-nineteenth century, books were still relatively expensive, and mass press and photography were just beginning. Literacy rates, although increasing, were still fairly low as education was not yet compulsory.<sup>188</sup> The presentation of high culture to the public was really only relevant to a small, elite section of society and the mode of display in museums produced an intimidating barrier to those out with this group. By the end of the nineteenth century, this bourgeois world was breaking down and the popular press was a driving force. In 1870, thirty-seven Parisian dailies sold a total of one million copies per day, the largest four accounting for 600,000 sales. By 1880, two million copies were selling each day, with *Le Petit Journal* selling half a million alone.<sup>189</sup> New printing techniques and better means of distribution facilitated circulation. Between 1870 and 1914 the French railway network trebled while the price of a daily paper, in real terms, was halved. In the same period, male literacy in France dropped from 20 percent to 4 percent.<sup>190</sup> By 1914, the four largest daily newspapers (*Le Petit*

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<sup>188</sup> Sassoon 2001, 171-2.

<sup>189</sup> Albert, Pierre. 1972. 'La Presse française de 1871 à 1940', in Claude Bellanger et al., *Histoire générale de la presse française*, Vol. 3, PUF, Paris, 137. As cited in Sassoon 2002, 172.

<sup>190</sup> Sassoon 2001, 172.

*Journal*, *Le Petit Parisien*, *Le Matin* and *Le Journal*) sold 4.5 million copies every day, equating to three-quarters of the market.<sup>191</sup> By the turn of the century, illustrated dailies were increasing in popularity such as *L'Excelsior* (by 1910 in Paris) and the *Illustrated London News* (founded in 1842 in Britain). Abroad, the number of magazines in the United States leapt from seven hundred to more than three thousand between 1865 and 1885.<sup>192</sup> In his extensive investigation of French contemporary mass media, historian Donald Sassoon concluded that what appealed to this new readership were human interest stories, the feats of adventurers and explorers, events surrounding royalty and celebrities, wars – especially colonial wars – and crime.<sup>193</sup> Thus, the theft of the *Mona Lisa* struck a particular chord with the public who, as established, were by then great consumers of mass print culture.

In the days following the theft of the *Mona Lisa*, criticism of the Louvre and its security was widespread across the papers both locally and abroad. The public's indignation at the theft was rooted in nationalistic identity. 'Nothing is known so far as to the whereabouts of the picture, and public feeling has turned from incredulity to the greatest indignation. The affair is discussed everywhere today as a national scandal of the first magnitude'.<sup>194</sup> The poignancy of the subject drew upon a history of cultural ownership. In France, the royal collection came to be seen as national property, part of the nation's cultural patrimony that had to be preserved for posterity. Andrew McClellan discusses this transformation in *Inventing the Louvre*:

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<sup>191</sup> Albert 1972, 297.

<sup>192</sup> Davis, Anthony, *Magazine Journalism Today*, Heinemann, London, 1988, p. 7-8. Quoted from Sassoon 2002, 173.

<sup>193</sup> Sassoon 2002, 173.

<sup>194</sup> '60 Detectives Seek Stolen "Mona Lisa"', *The New York Times*, 24 August 1911.

*Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in eighteenth-Century Paris*

(1999). He claims that ‘the French case’ anticipated modern national museums in which the rhetoric of collective ownership and the fostering of national pride remain crucial. The transfer of sovereignty from the crown to the nation encouraged people to see the Louvre as *their* museum.<sup>195</sup>

This strong sentiment permeated mass printed and visual culture, and took specific aim at museum security. The poet Guillaume Apollinaire wrote, ‘But what shall we say of the guard that watches the gates of the Louvre? There is not even one guard per gallery...The Louvre is less well protected than a Spanish museum’.<sup>196</sup>

Furthermore, in one of the first reports of the theft overseas, a Paris correspondent for the *The New York Times* communicated,

Feeling here about the affair is intense. An extraordinary number of absurd theories are advanced, while there is general criticism of the Louvre authorities, who have proved unable to guard what is considered the most precious work of art in the world.<sup>197</sup>

Most vocal in their criticism was *Paris-Journal*, *Le Matin*, and *L’Intransigeant*.

*Paris-Journal* went so far as to offer 50,000 francs for the return of the painting, a gesture blatantly discrediting the official investigation, while staff at the newspaper suggested that the following notice be posted in all French museums:

In the Interest of Art  
And for the Safeguarding of the Precious Objects,  
THE PUBLIC  
Is Requested to Be Good Enough to  
WAKE THE GUARDS  
If They Are Found to Be Asleep<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> McClellan 1999, 7.

<sup>196</sup> Apollinaire, Guillaume, ‘Le rapt de la Joconde’, *L’Intransigeant*, 24 August 1911.

<sup>197</sup> ‘”La Gioconda” is Stolen in Paris’, *The New York Times*, 23 August 1911.

<sup>198</sup> *Paris-Journal*, 24 August 1911.

Of further detriment to the Louvre's reputation, on 29 August 1911 *Paris-Journal* exposed the theft of two Iberian sculptures in 1907 (and another on 7 May 1911) from the Louvre.<sup>199</sup> The article published a letter from the anonymous thief. The article detailed how the thief, over the course of a few visits, stole the statues which he then sold on to a friend.<sup>200</sup> The friend turned out to be Apollinaire who, fearing repercussions (he was a foreigner by birth), brought them to the offices of *Paris-Journal* because they had offered to return them to the Louvre 'no questions asked'.<sup>201</sup> They were placed on display to the public in *Paris-Journal's* street-front window. In a journalistic triumph, the newspaper had succeeded in the restitution of stolen goods to the museum where the police had failed.

In an embarrassing turn, a few days before the scandal broke an editor from the newspaper contacted Edmond Pottier, curator of the Department of Oriental Antiquities at the Louvre, and asked him if he was aware of any thefts from his department. He replied that he was not. Thus, when the article was published, he was obliged to publicly admit that the objects were from his department and that he had not even known they were missing.<sup>202</sup> Apollinaire was subsequently arrested on 9

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<sup>199</sup> This was also the day the Louvre reopened to the public following the theft.

<sup>200</sup> 'Thief Brings Us a Work Stolen from the Louvre', *Paris-Journal*, 29 August, 1911.

<sup>201</sup> The thief who stole the Iberian sculptures was a man named Joseph-Honoré G ry Pieret, from Brussels, an acquaintance of Apollinaire. Apollinaire had in fact hired the man to be his personal secretary, but found him increasingly unreliable. He dismissed Pieret the day before the *Mona Lisa* was stolen. See 'Various "Clues" to Robbery of the "Mona Lisa", but Paris Fears That Picture is Lost Forever', *The New York Times*, 17 September 1911. It has been suggested that Apollinaire thought Pieret stole the *Mona Lisa* and feared repercussions for himself having harboured a thief and accepted stolen goods. Pieret had kept the statue stolen in 1911, but the two Iberian busts stolen in 1907 (and returned by Apollinaire) had actually been in the possession of Pablo Picasso, who became implicated in the theft but released after giving a deposition. These busts would influence his figures in *Les Femmes d'Alger*. For a recent reconsideration of the theft and the involvement of Apollinaire and Picasso see Loreti 2009.

<sup>202</sup> Loreti 2009, 53. Silvia Loreti discovered an official report of the incident by Pottier addressed to Th ophile Homolle, Director of the Louvre, 29 August 1911, Archives des mus es nationaux, Mus e du Louvre, folder A15. She first presented the evidence in a conference paper, 'Picasso and the

September for harbouring the thief of the Iberian statues and, in the absence of other credible leads, also charged with the theft of the *Mona Lisa* [Fig. 2.18]. Pieret wrote a letter in Apollinaire's defence that was also published in *Paris-Journal*, and this led to his release from prison after a few days.<sup>203</sup>

Apollinaire's involvement was explained in a private letter addressed to his friend Madeleine Pâges in July 1915.

I had hoped to turn [the theft] to good purpose by exposing the Louvre in a journalistic coup. We [he and Pieret] would have proposed to *Le Matin* to show the public how badly the Louvre's treasures were looked after by first stealing one statue – big deal – and then another – another big deal.<sup>204</sup>

Even though the Louvre was the 'victim' of these various thefts, the ease with which the *Mona Lisa* was stolen, combined with the revelation of the previous thefts of the Iberian statues was stolen was enough to set in motion an unprecedented and public interrogation of museum practice.

The institutional backlash became yet another repercussion of the theft that the Louvre had to address as it became increasingly obvious that the reputation of the museum and its staff was in jeopardy. The media exposure ensured the embarrassing details of inadequate security became public knowledge. Since no immediate culprit or motive could be established by police, blame quickly shifted to the museum. The government recognised that they needed to take action that would reflect how

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Louvre Thefts', Art Theft: History, Prevention, Detection and Solution (CRASSH conference), Cambridge University, 9-10 June 2006.

<sup>203</sup> Ignace D'Ormesan (alias G ry Pieret), Letter dated 9 September 1911, published in *Paris-Journal*, 12 September 1911.

<sup>204</sup> Apollinaire, Guillaume. 'Letter to Madeleine P ges, 30 July 1915' in Apollinaire, *Lettres   Madeleine. Tendre comme le souvenir*. 2005 (Gallimard, Paris), 96-98.

seriously they took the situation. Answering the public's call for accountability, initial decisions were decisive and drastic. The government fired Théophile Homolle, Director of the Musées Nationaux, along with the head guard of the Louvre and formally disciplined the rest of the security guards.<sup>205</sup> Eugène Pujale, an administrator with a security and police background, replaced Homolle, a noted scholar. In another clear signal of where its priorities lay, the number of guards was increased from about 125 to 180.<sup>206</sup> Procedures were drawn up which introduced more discipline and routine precautions, including a rule that a contractor had to list the names and addresses of his workmen, who would then be photographed.<sup>207</sup> On 18 September 1911, *Le Petit Parisien* published a front-page picture of the Louvre's most recent acquisitions, Jack and Milord, two fierce-looking guard dogs<sup>208</sup> [Fig. 2.19]. Pujale had asked Prefect of Police M. Lepine to supply him with two specially trained dogs to accompany the night watchmen on their rounds. 'It is thought that if any one attempts to sleep there in the future he will be instantly detected by these animals'.<sup>209</sup> Also, all locks in the museum were replaced, by the firm that supplied the Bank of France. This was also in response to the publication of the fact that at least one hundred sets of keys were in circulation at the time of the theft, and many of which could not be accounted for.<sup>210</sup> These upgrades were implemented within a month or so of the theft, which was also when the media attack on the institution and

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<sup>205</sup> 'Le Vol de la "Joconde": M.Homolle est destitué, le gardien-chef remplacé', *Le Petit Parisien*, 1 September 1911.

<sup>206</sup> 'Le Vol de la "Joconde": M.Homolle est destitué, le gardien-chef remplacé', *Le Petit Parisien*, 1 September 1911.

<sup>207</sup> Esterow 1973, 171.

<sup>208</sup> 'Le Vol de la "Joconde"', *Le Petit Parisien*, 18 September 1911.

<sup>209</sup> 'Various "Clues" to Robbery of the "Mona Lisa", but Paris Fears That Picture is Lost Forever', *The New York Times*, 17 September 1911.

<sup>210</sup> 'Louvre Anarchy May Cause More Thefts of Art Gems', *The New York Times*, 28 January 1912.

the irreverent parody of the theft in the streets were at their height. Thus it is possible that both of these elements played a role in the shaping of a new standard of museum security.

One of the most derisive attacks on Louvre security was published in an article in the *Revue Bleu* in January 1912. A Parisian writer signing himself ‘Péladan’ suggested that the security guards were ‘masters of the Louvre’ and that in their collective power they could drive from the museum any superior who attempted to restrict or discipline them.

For a quarter of a century the attendants at the Louvre have successfully repulsed Directors and Cabinet Ministers. If the worst thing that could happen in the gallery – the theft of the *Mona Lisa* – has not brought down any punishment on their heads, we must take it for granted that our museum is another Bastille, which nobody is capable of taking by assault.<sup>211</sup>

He cited how, with respect to the disciplinary action of the guards following the theft, the disciplinary council was made up of their own numbers and thus questioned its effectiveness. There may have been a grain of truth to the claim since Homolle, director of the Louvre, was fired as a result of the theft as he was ultimately responsible for museum operations (though not even in the country at the time) yet not a single guard was dismissed. This is significant if the ‘discipline’ of the guards, which the Louvre was keen to assure the public was severe and prompt, was in fact carried out by a committee of their peers.

Péladan took issue with the incompetence of the guards, citing several examples. Of interest is that Péladan’s attack on Louvre security comes five months after the theft, at a point when the initial backlash had died down and there would

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<sup>211</sup> ‘Louvre Anarchy May Cause More Thefts of Art Gems’, *The New York Times*, 28 January 1912.

have been opportunity to assess the new measures that had been undertaken, such as the addition of guard dogs and installation of superior locks. He claimed that,

In spite of police dogs, in spite of locks installed by the best of locksmiths employed to safeguard the Bank of France...that sort of thing is futile as long as the attendants are immune from punishment. As long as the crime of the 21<sup>st</sup> of August goes unpunished, the precious paintings of the Louvre are in danger.<sup>212</sup>

These claims highlight the ineffectiveness of new measures if those implementing and monitoring them are unreliable, a problem still plaguing the field of museum security today. In scathing form, Péladan stated that the guard dogs were introduced because the attendants did not like to go through the halls in the dark – that they lacked ‘midnight courage’, and he drew attention to the porter on duty when the thief walked out through the Cour Visconti, who was asleep with a red umbrella raised before him to keep away the sunlight.<sup>213</sup> He also noted that directly behind the wall of the *Mona Lisa* was an alcohol lamp on which attendants prepared hot beverages for themselves, in spite of the risk of fire, and that the attendants smoke their pipes in this room, surrounded by wrapping paper and other rubbish.<sup>214</sup> Such intimate knowledge of the Louvre’s inner workings suggests that Péladan may have been a disgruntled employee, or at the very least, closely acquainted with one. Nevertheless, it was another widely-circulated critique of Louvre security, foregrounding the sensitive topic yet again.

Owing to the increase in the number of guards following the theft, their presence in the museum would have been noticeably greater. If accounts like Péladan’s below are a reflection of public opinion, this would have produced a

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<sup>212</sup> ‘Louvre Anarchy May Cause More Thefts of Art Gems’, *The New York Times*, 28 January 1912.

<sup>213</sup> ‘Louvre Anarchy May Cause More Thefts of Art Gems’, *The New York Times*, 28 January 1912.

<sup>214</sup> ‘Louvre Anarchy May Cause More Thefts of Art Gems’, *The New York Times*, 28 January 1912.



tension within the space if visitors reacted to their presence with contempt, resentment or complete lack of confidence in their capacity, as fuelled by the media. It would surely have affected the viewing experience and contributed significantly to the emerging anxiety not only at the site of the empty space, but throughout the whole museum.

Everybody who now visits the Louvre is filled with scorn for those who can neither keep nor avenge the masterpieces of the gallery. They are 'one hundred and twenty-five men in rebellion against all humanity'... France is responsible in the eyes of every person of culture for this irreparable loss, which the soul of the universe mourns and will mourn ever-more.<sup>215</sup>

This accusation resonates with the anger and bitterness of the early theft reports, but went further in constructing a powerful image of a Louvre security guard as arrogant; lacking in both aptitude and conscience. In the absence of a motive for the theft, the Louvre was forced to shoulder the responsibility for the loss, but it was the security guards who became the public 'face' of that disgrace.

It would be misleading however, to say that this was a stereotype created by the theft and Péladan refers to the behaviour occurring for at least a quarter of a century beforehand. With consideration to the loud, haughty guards in Biard's *Closing Time* and *Four o'clock at the Salon*, both 1847, [Fig. 2.16 and Fig. 2.20] it would seem that this unflattering image of Louvre security guards emerged at some point between the early and mid nineteenth century, perhaps in parallel to the strains of dealing with the changing, and at times challenging, museum public. A painting acquired by the Louvre in 2005 entitled *Portrait of Old Fuzelier, Attendant at the Louvre*, c.1805 and attributed to the studio of Jacques Louis David gives a very

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<sup>215</sup> 'Louvre Anarchy May Cause More Thefts of Art Gems', *The New York Times*, 28 January 1912.

different impression [Fig. 2.21]. ‘Old Fuzelier’, as he was nicknamed, was the oldest of the first thirteen attendants at the Musée Napoléon (later the Louvre). He was responsible for security, cleaning, and gallery installation and is pictured wearing the uniform which was customary at the Museum Central des Arts (the museum’s former name) during the Consulate, suggesting that he had already been employed for quite some time.<sup>216</sup> In a Titian-esque manner, the guard is seated in three-quarter profile with a somewhat benign and thoughtful expression. There is nothing in the portrait to suggest incompetence or arrogance.

Conversely, not a single positive thing had been reported about Louvre guards following the theft, and their image suffered badly. Appearing shortly after Péladan’s article, Louis Béroud’s *A Guard at the Louvre*, 1912, is a visual manifestation of this contemporary public opinion [Fig. 2.22]. In sharp contrast to the *Portrait of Old Fuzelier*, here, a guard has fallen asleep while seated beside a doorway. It’s very clear due to the wall panelling and unique star-centred motif of the parquet floor that the setting is the Salon Carré. Due to its transformation into a widely publicised crime scene following the theft, this would have been instantly recognisable to a much wider audience. Furthermore, at the time this picture was created the *Mona Lisa* was still missing. Thus, the sleeping guard is symbolic of the Louvre’s role in the theft.

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<sup>216</sup> ‘Portrait of Old Fuzelier: Recent Acquisitions’, *Louvre website*, 12 July 2005. Last accessed 15 June 2011.

[http://www.louvre.fr/llv/oeuvres/detail\\_actualite.jsp?CONTENT%3C%3Ecnt\\_id=10134198673405315&CURRENT\\_LL\\_V\\_FICHE%3C%3Ecnt\\_id=10134198673405315&FOLDER%3C%3Efolder\\_id=9852723696500764&bmLocale=en](http://www.louvre.fr/llv/oeuvres/detail_actualite.jsp?CONTENT%3C%3Ecnt_id=10134198673405315&CURRENT_LL_V_FICHE%3C%3Ecnt_id=10134198673405315&FOLDER%3C%3Efolder_id=9852723696500764&bmLocale=en).

### **Irreverent Parody of the Theft**

The prolific media attack on the Louvre and its security was paralleled by irreverent parody in the streets of Paris. It was regularly lampooned in songs, postcards, cabarets and short films following the theft. At the Olympia, a popular theatre in Paris, the comic duo Rip and Bousquet entertained the crowds with a satirical act in which a Louvre guard is dusting a priceless statue which he drops, breaking it. Unfazed, he simply dusts away the pieces while clumsily knocking over more statues and pictures. Friends and casual acquaintances drop in to ‘borrow’ items to decorate their homes and tourists are asked, ‘How about a Murillo, or would you prefer a Rembrandt, or a Raphael?’<sup>217</sup>

Less than two weeks after the theft a short film appeared at the Omnia Pathé entitled *Nick Winter et le vol de la Joconde*. The director-general of Pathé’s studios at Vincennes was Ferdinand Zecca (1864-1947) who was credited with excellent instincts for what the public would pay to see, making Pathé Frères the dominant production company in French cinema in the early twentieth century.<sup>218</sup> Zecca specialised in realistic one-reel melodramas of the lower classes such as *L’Histoire d’un crime* (1901) and *Les victimes de l’alcoolisme* (1902).<sup>219</sup> He developed the *course comique* (‘comic chase’) filmed mainly in the streets of Paris, in which cutting for parallel action was combined with trick photography that was aimed at achieving laughter over suspense. It is precisely within this genre that the film falls.

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<sup>217</sup> A transcript of the act was published in *The Excelsior*, 7 October 1911.

<sup>218</sup> Cook, David A. 1996. *A History of Narrative Film* (New York, Norton & Company), 48.

<sup>219</sup> The latter was a five-minute adaptation of Émile Zola’s 1877 novel *L’Assommoir* (Charpentier, Paris.)

Among the viewers of *Nick Winter et le vol de la Joconde* on 10 September 1911 were Franz Kafka and Max Brod who, as discussed had been to the Louvre on the previous day to see the empty space on the wall. Brod gave the following detailed account of the five-minute production which reads in a manner similar to the fast-paced movement and fractured projection of the film.

At the end after the usual revolver shots, chases, fisticuffs, came the news. Naturally she was not absent – the one you now see on all the advertisements, candy boxes, and postcards in Paris: *Mona Lisa*. The picture opened with the presentation of M. Croumolle (everyone knows that it means ‘Homolle’, and no one protests against the perfidious way they are going after the gray-haired Delphi scholar). Croumolle is lying in bed, his stocking cap pulled down over his ears, and is startled out of sleep by a telegram: ‘*Mona Lisa Stolen*’. Croumolle – the Delphi scholar, if you please, but I am not protesting, I was laughing so hard – dresses himself with clownlike agility, now he puts both feet into one leg of his pants; now one foot into two socks. In the end, he runs into the street with his suspenders trailing, all the bystanders turn around to look at him, even those who are far in the background and evidently not in the pay of Pathé...<sup>220</sup>

The unsubtle parody of Louvre director Homolle reflected the way in which he had become a target not only of the government administrators but of the public in general. His professional reputation, like that of the Louvre, had been reduced to comedic fodder. The following film still shows the director ‘Croumolle’ roused from sleep by a telegram with the news of the theft [Fig. 2.23]. However, the avant-garde, to whom films such as this appealed, perhaps saw Homolle as a tragic figure; a scapegoat of governmental politics. Throughout Broad’s account, there is an underlying pathos in his descriptions of the character, particularly at the end (see below).

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<sup>220</sup> Zischler 2003, 49-51.

Brod's recounting of the film turns to the events unfolding at the Louvre where the empty space is encountered, and it stands out that the behaviour of the characters is completely incongruous with the museum setting.

The story is set in the hall of the Louvre, everything excellently imitated, the paintings and, in the middle, the three nails on which the *Mona Lisa* hung. Horror; summoning of a comical detective; a shoe button of Croumolle's as a red herring; the detective as shoeshine boy; chase through the cafés of Paris; passers-by forced to have their shoes shined; arrest of the unfortunate Croumolle, for the button that was found at the scene naturally matches his shoe buttons. And now the final gag – while everyone is running through the hall at the Louvre and acting sensational, the thief sneaks in, the *Mona Lisa* under his arm, hangs her back where she belongs, and takes Velázquez's *Princess* instead. No one notices him. Suddenly someone sees the *Mona Lisa*; general astonishment and note in one corner of the rediscovered painting that says, 'Pardon me, I am nearsighted. I actually wanted to have the painting next to it'. Croumolle, poor man, is released.<sup>221</sup>

Thus, the characters bring actions and behaviour suited to the streets of Paris (the *course comique*, or 'comic chase') into the museum. In Fig. 2.24, the thief is returning the *Mona Lisa* and the note is visible in the right hand corner of the painting [Fig. 2.24]. While the inappropriate behaviour in the film produced humorous results, it did not seem to serve as an invitation to act in a similar manner at the (actual) Salon Carré where, as noted, visitors were noted to have behaved with solemnity and respect.

The theft also became the subject of cabaret songs, often using new lyrics to old tunes which became almost instantly available. *Le Petit Parisien* reported three being sold on the streets within days of the theft.<sup>222</sup> In contrast to the prolific media

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<sup>221</sup> Zischler 2003, 51.

<sup>222</sup> Sassoon 2001, 179.

attack on the Louvre, these songs were light-hearted and irreverent, ‘with no sense that a terrible fate had befallen France’s artistic heritage’.<sup>223</sup> For example,

Mon Poteau  
 Embrosse-moi, j’suis pas bégueule.  
 J’m’ennuyais beaucoup dans ce palais.  
 Un soir que le gardien criait  
 ‘On ferm’!...’j’ai répondu: ‘ta gueule!...’  
 Et j’suis carapatée tout’s seule.

(Roughly: ‘Hi mate, give us a kiss, I ain’t squeamish, I was very bored in that palace. One evening, when the guard shouted “closing time”, I said “up yours” and made myself scarce’.)<sup>224</sup>

Sheet music by Antonin Louis for the song ‘La “Joconde” en vadrouille’ (*Mona Lisa* on a spree’) enjoyed steady sales in the weeks following the theft.<sup>225</sup> Sung to the tune of a French folksong ‘Auprès de ma blonde’, the lyrics lamented the theft, wondered where the painting was and commented on the ‘sleeping guards’ [Fig. 2.25]. Another song, ‘L’as-tu vue? la Joconde!!’, mocks the security at the Louvre with lyrics, ‘It couldn’t be stolen, we guard her all the time, except on Mondays’. The song goes on to wonder whether ‘she’ was not simply fed up with visitors and ends, ‘Soon they’ll nick the Venus de Milo’<sup>226</sup> [Fig. 2.26].

The sale of music and postcards on the street was an easy way for people to profit from the theft, just as the Louvre, responsible for the loss in the first place, benefitted from increased attendance and their own postcard sales inside the museum. Street vendors became a popular sight on the street, particularly around the Louvre [Fig. 2.27]. Postcards ranged from a simple image of the *Mona Lisa* marking

<sup>223</sup> Sassoon 2001, 179.

<sup>224</sup> ‘Le Vol de la Joconde’. 1911. Words by F. Bossuyt, music by D. Berniaux, sheet music published by Berniaux in Paris, translated by Sassoon 2001, 179.

<sup>225</sup> Sassoon 2006, 235.

<sup>226</sup> ‘L’as-tu vue? la Joconde!!’ As translated in Sassoon 2001, 179.

her disappearance from the Louvre on 21 August 1911 [Fig. 2.28] to a clever card with figures praying to St Anthony, patron saint of lost things which, when held against the heat from the flame of a match or a cigar makes an image of the *Mona Lisa* appear [Fig. 2.29]. A satirical dig at the lack of clues in the investigation, one postcard shows the painting being taken off the wall in the Salon Carré by rats with the caption, 'Maybe the rats took her' [Fig. 2.30]. An uncaptioned caricature of the *Mona Lisa* thumbs her nose at any endless amount of possibilities; perhaps she's mocking the investigators who cannot find her, or the Louvre who could not keep her on its wall [Fig. 2.31]. By 1912, when the painting was still missing, a series of satirical postcards were printed with the head of the *Mona Lisa* superimposed upon figures in various famous landmarks around the world, including one which sees her travelling in Egypt with Arsène Lupin, the popular fictional gentleman-thief [Figs. 2.32 – 2.35].

Looking across various ephemera that emerged in the wake of the theft it would seem that the more ephemeral the source, the more irreverent the tone. For instance, newspapers, though fairly scathing and unrestrained in their reporting, were not as brazen in their mockery of the painting and the institution as songs, postcards, and short films. Whilst the endless reproduction of the *Mona Lisa* in ephemera following the theft was a precursor to the painting's status as a global icon, it proved to be a powerful tool in conjuring public opinion against the Louvre for failing to protect such an important object. The underlying disrespect for government administration permeated this ephemeral material, fuelled the public's indignation and incredulity at the theft, and was thus given a voice in mass culture via its

dissemination. The expression of the incompetence of the Louvre via irreverent parody would have made the museum more accessible to unfamiliar audiences by breaking down established elitist associations whilst also resonating with the intellectual and political preoccupations of the avant-garde.

### **The theft and popular crime narratives**

Contemporaneous crime narratives, in particular the successful serial publications of *Fantômas* and *Arsène Lupin*, familiarised the public with an imagined urban criminality in early twentieth-century Paris. The theft resonated with the wide scale consumption of these stories so that upon the display of the empty space at the Louvre it was as if fiction had been transformed into reality. *Fantômas* was a series of thirty-two consecutive monthly crime novels, originally published in Paris by Arthème Fayard from February 1911 to September 1913 [Fig. 2.36]. Written by Pierre Souvestre and Marcel Allain, the novels featured the figure of Fantômas, the ‘Emperor of Crime’ and ‘Lord of Terror’, who was a master of disguise, committing shocking violent acts (murder, torture, robbery) against innocent victims.<sup>227</sup> Unlike their nineteenth-century predecessors, the *Fantômas* novels did not conclude with the restoration of the moral order. Instead, the archvillain escapes only to perpetrate more cruelties in the next episode.

To make it further appealing to a mass audience, *Fantômas* was set in a highly recognisable Parisian landscape and was sold at a cost of only sixty-five

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<sup>227</sup> Walz, Robin and Elliott Smith. 2011. ‘Fantômas: The first pulp fiction’, *Fantomas-Lives*, <http://www.fantomas-lives.com/fanto21.htm> [last accessed 13 June 2011].



centimes, ‘a sum within the reach of all but the very poorest Parisians’.<sup>228</sup> The novels played upon the public’s mix of fear and fascination with the Belle Époque underworld. Fantômas was a leader of a vast army of *les apaches* who spread terror and chaos throughout the city. Historically hailing from working-class neighbourhoods such as Belleville, *les apaches* were very much a real threat on the streets of Paris as they targeted the middle class in wealthier areas of the city. In ‘Julot the Apache’, first published in *Ballads of a Bohemian* (1921) Robert W. Service wrote,

You’ve heard of Julot the apache, and Gigolette, his mome...  
 Montmartre was their hunting-ground, but Belville [sic] was their  
 home.<sup>229</sup>

*Les apaches* were unafraid to use violence and weapons even in broad daylight and this culture of anxiety was something that crime narratives (novels and the press) tapped into.

Guillaume Apollinaire and Max Jacob founded the ‘Société des Amis de Fantômas’ in 1912 and many surrealists incorporated *Fantômas* into their literary productions. Max Jacob included two *Fantômas* prose-poems in his 1916 collection *Le Cornet à dés* (‘The Dice Cup’). Apollinaire wrote a review of the *Fantômas* novels for the literary journal *Mercure de France*, praising them as among the most imaginative works in existence.<sup>230</sup> Surrealist artists also appropriated the image, for example Juan Gris, *Fantômas (Pipe and Newspaper)*, 1915 [Fig. 2.37]. In this piece, a *Fantômas* novel is included amongst a number of everyday objects scattered about

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<sup>228</sup> Walz and Smith 2011, <<http://www.fantomas-lives.com/fanto21.htm>>.

<sup>229</sup> Service, Robert W. 1921. ‘Julot the Apache’, *Ballads of a Bohemian* (Newark, New York, Barse & Hopkins).

<sup>230</sup> Apollinaire, Guillaume. 16 July 1914. ‘Fantômas’, *Mercure de France*, 422-3.

a café table, including *Le Journal*, a daily newspaper which prominently featured sensationalised crime stories. As historian Robin Walz (2000) noted, Georges Sadoul, Jacques Prévert, Raymond Queneau, and Yves Tanguy used to play a game in which one of them would call out a *Fantômas* title, and the others would try to guess the number of murders committed in that episode.<sup>231</sup> Thus, *Fantômas* appealed to the avant-garde in search of intersections between psychological anxiety, social rebellion, and intellectual mass culture but it also cut across society and found even greater consumption in mainstream markets. Though the theft of the *Mona Lisa* was not written into *Fantômas* narrative, the widespread popularity of the novels at exactly the time of theft illustrates the public appetite for crime narrative that fuelled interest in the case.

The character of Arsène Lupin was first introduced in a series of short stories in *Je sais tout* from 1905 by Maurice Leblanc<sup>232</sup> [Fig. 2.38]. In contrast to the sadistic, unmotivated violence of *Fantômas*, Arsène Lupin specialised in ‘impossible’ crimes by using his rakish charm which was applied to his daring escapades. The first stage production was *Arsène Lupin - Nouvelles Aventures* by Maurice Leblanc Francis de Croisset. Directed by Monsieur Deval, it was a four-act play first performed on 28 October 1908 at the Athénée in Paris [Fig. 2.39]. Another production followed in 1910 however, *Le Retour d'Arsène Lupin*, a one-act play by Maurice Leblanc and Francis de Croisset was first performed on 16 September 1911, at the Théâtre de la Cigale in Paris, just three weeks after the theft of the *Mona Lisa*.

In a conflation of the 1908 and 1911 plays by Leblanc, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

<sup>231</sup> Sadoul, Georges. 1965. “Souvenirs d’un témoin” *Surréalisme et Cinéma (1)*, special issue of *Études Cinématographiques*, nos. 38 – 39, 12. As cited in Walz 2000, 70.

<sup>232</sup> Leblanc, Maurice. 15 July 1905. ‘Arsène Lupin,’ *Je sais tout*, 6.

produced a movie in 1932 starring brothers John Barrymore as the Duke of Charmerace (Lupin) and Lionel Barrymore as Inspector Guerchard, a cranky, ill-tempered detective<sup>233</sup> [Fig. 2.40].

As in the novels, the identity of Lupin is unknown until the end, when he decides to steal the *Mona Lisa* from the Louvre. To heighten the difficulty of the task, Lupin gives advance notice of his intentions to Inspector Guerchard who places the original in a vault and put a copy on display.<sup>234</sup> The movie employs similar tactics to earlier films and cabarets about the theft by both highlighting the significance of the painting while making a parody of museum security and police investigators. Once at the Louvre, an imagined setting, a museum guide is heard telling visitors that the *Mona Lisa* is the ‘most famous painting in the world’ and the ‘most valuable painting in the Louvre’.<sup>235</sup> When police attention is diverted through a series of clever ploys, including the setting of a fire to provide a dramatic smoke-screen, the words, ‘tut, tut’ are found scrawled across the copy on the wall, and the empty frame of the original is discovered in the vault with the message, ‘tut, tut and also tut, Arsène Lupin’.<sup>236</sup> Bartering for his freedom, Lupin threatens to expose Guerchard as the man who lost ‘the pride of France, the most famous picture in the world’.<sup>237</sup>

A further linkage between crime narrative and the theft of the *Mona Lisa* lies with the involvement of Alphonse Bertillon in the investigation. As somewhat of a

<sup>233</sup> *Arsène Lupin* (film). 1932. Directed by Jack Conway, released by Merto-Goldwyn-Mayer, 84 min.

<sup>234</sup> An earlier scene reveals that all the doors and windows at the Louvre are guarded and two policemen are watching the *Mona Lisa*.

<sup>235</sup> *Arsène Lupin* (film) 1932.

<sup>236</sup> In this adaptation, the *Mona Lisa* was painted on canvas, not a panel. It is rolled up and smuggled out of the museum in a basket of flowers, and eventually returned to police by Lupin wrapped around his umbrella.

<sup>237</sup> *Arsène Lupin* (film) 1932.

celebrity figure, his participation was noted in the newspapers and reflected the high priority of the investigation. However, it also glamourised the crime scene at the Louvre in that his reputation as a leading forensic investigator permeated popular crime narratives.<sup>238</sup> In *The Escape of Arsène Lupin* (1906), gentleman thief Lupin is released from custody when police believe he is someone else. It transpires that he changed his facial structure by injecting paraffin in certain areas, applied an acid to change the colour of his skin, and used chemicals to affect the growth of his hair and beard as well as to change the tone of his voice.<sup>239</sup> The publication date of 1906 coincides with the exposure of the role Bertillon's methods played in the wrongful conviction of Alfred Dreyfus and the publicity surround the events may be why the character goes to such extremes to distort his appearance. Lupin exploits Bertillon's anthropometry by the very flaws that led to its eventual disuse.

### **The theft and local anxieties: American conspiracy theories**

Public interest in the theft prompted a surge of reporting that left journalists scrambling for anything to print on the subject. As journalism reached near-hysteria, outlandish theories flourished and motivations for the theft played out in the press reaching across all strata of society. Significant attention was given to the idea that a

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<sup>238</sup> For instance, in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902), when asking for Sherlock Holmes's assistance Dr. Mortimer offends the detective:

“Recognizing, as I do, that you are the second highest expert in Europe ---“

“Indeed, sir! May I inquire who has the honour to be the first?” asked Holmes with some asperity.

“To the man of precisely scientific mind the work of Monsieur Bertillon must always appeal strongly.”

(From Doyle, Sir Arthur Conan. 2010. *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (London, Bibliolis). First published 1902.

<sup>239</sup> Leblanc, Maurice. 15 January 1906. ‘La Vie extraordinaire d'Arsène Lupin: L'Évasion d'Arsène Lupin’, *Je sais tout*, 12.

wealthy American art collector had commissioned the theft. Just four days after the crime, *The New York Times* reported, ‘Tales of the fabulous wealth and reckless extravagance of Americans are accepted more readily in Europe than on this side of the Atlantic’.<sup>240</sup> On the day after the Louvre reopened to the public following the theft the *Petit Parisien* ran the headline, ‘Is the *Mona Lisa* in New York?’<sup>241</sup> J.P. Morgan was the preferred candidate in the press and was eventually compelled to issue a public statement declaring his innocence and his resentment of the implication that he would deal in stolen property.<sup>242</sup>

In ‘Crime stories in the historical urban landscape: narrating the theft of the *Mona Lisa*’ (2006), Freundschuh links the emergence of conspiracy theories with an underlying spatial tension on behalf of Parisians, particularly those in working-class neighbourhoods, with Americans in the city.

Since the earliest days of the Third Republic, Parisians had animadverted on the steadily aggrandizing Anglo-American population, which they referred to as an ‘invasion’; the moneyed expatriates of the eighth and ninth arrondissements were known as *la colonie américaine*. The Place de l’Opéra and its environs seemed especially susceptible to American investment...Overt spatial encroachment was likened to the contemporaneous mass purchasing of French cultural treasures by people like J.P. Morgan.<sup>243</sup>

As Freundschuh demonstrates, urban geography and social class inflected accounts of the theft. In a pertinent example, he cites the case of a 14 year old prostitute Germaine Terclavers who told police that the *Mona Lisa* had been stolen by Georges,

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<sup>240</sup> ‘The Stolen Masterwork’. *The New York Times*, 25 August 1911.

<sup>241</sup> *Le Petit Parisien*, 30 August 1911.

<sup>242</sup> For Morgan’s involvement see, ‘Say they have the “Mona Lisa.” Two Men Go to Rome to See J.P. Morgan About It’. *The New York Times*, 12 April 1912. For his public reply to these ‘stupid inventions’, see ‘Mr. Morgan Annoyed. Resents Intimation That He Would Deal with “Mona Lisa” Thieves’. *The New York Times*, 13 April 1913.

<sup>243</sup> Freundschuh 2006, 285.

her *souteneur*, or pimp, and his gang from the working-class Belleville neighbourhood in north-eastern Paris.<sup>244</sup> Terclavers said she saw the painting in Belleville and that Georges had planned to smuggle it onboard an ocean liner departing from Le Havre to the United States.<sup>245</sup> It transpired that there was no support for her claims and that the young girl had been trying to build a case against her neglectful and abusive former lover, who was eventually questioned and arrested for possession of an illegal weapon. However, she knew to incriminate Georges on various grounds including the claim that he did not come home the night of the theft but arrived late Monday morning and refused to say where he had been. She wove American prejudice into her account by claiming that the gang had been hired by an American art dealer who was going to ship the painting to New York. Furthermore, she said the gang intended to commit one more burglary near the Faubourg-St Honoré – the affluent eighth arrondissement settled by the *colonie américaine* – before smuggling the painting abroad.<sup>246</sup> The exceptional detail of her accusations, especially considering there was a good chance she was illiterate, reveals the extent to which the theft was intimately linked to local anxieties.

Crime narratives in the form of popular serials and Parisian daily newspapers were consumed in the millions of issues. ‘These forms of mass culture cut across social class, found adherents at multiple intellectual levels, and, in translation,

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<sup>244</sup> Belleville, also home of the street gang *les apaches*, was historically a working class neighborhood. In 1871, residents of the incorporated neighborhood of Belleville were some of the strongest supporters of the Paris Commune.

<sup>245</sup> ‘Pistes diverses’, Archives Nationales, Paris, F7 14865, Fol. 12. As cited in Freundsuh 2006, 286.

<sup>246</sup> Freundsuh 2006, 287.

crossed language and national barriers as well'.<sup>247</sup> Because of the theft and its resonance with crime narratives the space in the museum became interesting to an audience wider than that dictated by previous conventions. When examined collectively with the devaluation of the reputation of the institution and its implied stability and security, and the appropriation of the theft by ephemeral and irreverent spheres, the following months saw not only an increase in visitors to the Louvre but a suspension of the exclusivity that was embedded in both architecture and practice.

### **Curating the empty space: difficulties of display**

For months the space once occupied by the *Mona Lisa* in the Louvre remained vacant. On the surface, this gesture might represent the anticipation or hope of the painting's return however; certain factors suggest that it was the result of more astute motivations. Following the theft, more people came to see the empty space on the wall than had ever previously visited the Louvre. Even in the wake of negative press, the extensive publicity drew people to the museum. The increase in sales of souvenirs such as postcards, prints and song parodies, as much as they inhabited an ephemeral and 'silly' realm, marked the prominence of the theft. As a result, the *Mona Lisa* achieved a new kind of iconic status, and it was at this point that the Baedeker tourist guide referred to it as 'the best known female portrait in the world'.<sup>248</sup> Foreshadowing its later appropriation by Dada, Surrealist, Pop Art and advertising, the reproduction of this famous image during its absence imprinted it upon public memory.

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<sup>247</sup> Walz 2000, 11.

<sup>248</sup> Baedeker, Karl. 1911. *Paris and Its Environs: Handbook for Travelers* (Leipzig, Karl Baedeker), 112.

*Mona Lisa*'s absence changed its meaning forever – Leonardo's famous painting had encountered modernity. In a sense it was 'removed for photography' to be endlessly reproduced mechanically.<sup>249</sup>

At some point before the first anniversary of the theft the Louvre decided to hang a colour reproduction of the *Mona Lisa* in the space on the wall [Fig. 2.41]. The following passage describes how, as the reproduction began to deteriorate, a sense of tragedy and awkwardness emerged within the museum space.

A year after the *Mona Lisa* vanished, the officials of the Louvre were forced to confront the unthinkable: that she would never return. The blank space on the wall of the Salon Carré had been filled with a colored reproduction of the painting. Even that had begun to fade and curl, and many people now averted their eyes as they passed it, as if to avoid the reminder of a tragic death.<sup>250</sup>

By the end of 1911, the optimistic tone of the newspapers was fading. Even international headlines lamented the lack of progress in recovering the painting. On New Year's Eve *The New York Times* printed the article, 'Year Closes with Many Mysteries Still Unsolved'.<sup>251</sup> Apart from a few 'post-mortems' in the press, there was nothing new to report on the hunt for the painting or the thieves. Less people came to see the space at the Louvre, sales of *Mona Lisa* souvenirs gradually declined, rumours of war in Europe increased, and a new headline dominated the press – the sinking of the Titanic on 15 April 1912. Furthermore, the traditional Parisian mid-Lent parade included a float with a giant copy of the *Mona Lisa* taking off in an airplane from the roof of a cardboard Louvre; a forlorn gesture that seemed to summarise the public's feeling on the subject [ Figs. 2.42 and 2.43].

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<sup>249</sup> Storrie 2005, 15.

<sup>250</sup> Hoobler and Hoobler 2009, 249.

<sup>251</sup> 'Year Closes with Many Mysteries Still Unsolved', *The New York Times*, 31 December 1911.



By January 1912, the Louvre made the decision to hang Raphael's *Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione*, 1528, in the *Mona Lisa*'s space<sup>252</sup> [Fig. 2.44]. As Raphael's portrait was directly inspired by the *Mona Lisa* this decision may have been an acknowledgement on behalf of the Louvre that they had done all they could to find the missing painting and now needed to move on. Incidentally, in March 1912 the Louvre acquired another well-known homage to the *Mona Lisa* – Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot's *La Femme à la perle* [Fig. 2.45]. The Louvre certainly experienced *succès de scandale*, benefiting for a long time from the increased attendance numbers and revenue however, given that the decision to replace the *Mona Lisa* came only after public interest began to fade, it would seem that the idea of 'moving on' was not entirely altruistic. The reception of the change was met with resignation that the *Mona Lisa* would not return. Art critic Robert de la Sizeranne wrote at the time,

One feels a certain malaise on seeing in the middle of the Salon Carré in the place of the familiar smile – the most feminine of all smiles – this man with his ample beard, with his skull tightly wrapped and haloed by an immense black biretta...who looks out at you calmly with his big blue eyes. One knew very well that the *Gioconda* would not be seen again, but it seemed that the place she had occupied for such a long time was a little hallowed, and that a man ought not to settle himself there in so comfortable and self-important a way.<sup>253</sup>

Not only did the Louvre eventually replace the *Mona Lisa* in the Salon Carré, but the Italian-Spanish section of the museum's catalogue that was published in 1913 omits the *Mona Lisa* altogether.<sup>254</sup> According to the catalogue it was as if the painting never existed. The *Mona Lisa* was now permanently absent from the Louvre in both

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<sup>252</sup> 'In "Mona Lisa's" Place', *The New York Times*, 7 January 1912.

<sup>253</sup> De la Sizeranne, Robert. November – December 1912. 'Les Masques et les Visages au Louvre', *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 12: 117-18. Translation taken from Reit 1981, 116.

<sup>254</sup> Sassoon 2001, 182.

display and print. Only the occasional update (of nothing new to report) in the newspapers kept the painting in public memory.

## **Security as a Reproduction of Institutional Hierarchies**

### **I. Display of the *Mona Lisa* 1516 – 1911**

While the literature surrounding the theft of the *Mona Lisa* is concerned with the debate over whether the painting became famous as a result of the theft, the physical alterations to its display and the implementation of security measures exclusive to the painting after its recovery in 1913 support the idea that regardless of its status beforehand, the theft marked a permanent alteration to the relationship between object, viewer and space.<sup>255</sup> The case study of the theft of the *Mona Lisa* allows for a consideration of the degree to which security measures reinforce a hierarchical structure based upon exclusivity within the museum.

From the early nineteenth-century, as the *Mona Lisa* increased in popularity its position and display within the Louvre changed and its respective security grew in sophistication. Of importance is the way these security measures reveal underlying assumptions and value judgements embedded within the condition of display. Following the recovery of the painting in 1913, its exhibition reinforced the iconic status of the object but began to expose the museum's paradoxical principles of display.

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<sup>255</sup> For a detailed discussion of the complex historical process which made the *Mona Lisa* so famous and a summary of the debate over the theft's impact upon its fame, see Sassoon 2001.

The measures introduced by the Louvre to make the *Mona Lisa* visible to a wider audience meant that the painting would hang in increasing degrees of isolation, ‘orphaned’ by its setting from the public, the rest of the Italian School paintings, and even the rest of the collection. This case study will focus on the impact that the security measures had on the display and accessibility of the painting, its ability to travel on loan, and its critical reception. A brief examination will follow, of the display of the *Mona Lisa* since it arrived in France in the sixteenth century before turning attention to the post-1913 period and the museological implications of its singular treatment.

In 1516 Leonardo da Vinci brought the *Mona Lisa* from Florence to his quarters at Clos Lucé near Château d'Amboise, leaving the painting to his assistant Salai upon his death in 1519. When Salai died in 1525, his heirs sold the painting to Francis I for 4,000 *écus*.<sup>256</sup> By the 1530s it was hanging in the *Appartements des Bains* at Fontainebleau. It remained at Fontainebleau until Louis XIV brought it to Versailles, where it then hung until the French Revolution, at which point it was formally transferred to the Louvre in 1797.<sup>257</sup> Napoleon I hung the *Mona Lisa* in his bedroom at the Tuileries Palace from 1800 to 1804, an indication of his preference for the painting. In 1804 it was returned to the Louvre, which had been renamed Musée Napoléon in 1803, and was installed in the newly decorated Grande Galerie where it hung in relative obscurity below more popular Italian masterpieces. For

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<sup>256</sup> There is some debate about the exact manner in which Francis I acquired the painting, but this is a generally accepted account. See Greenstein, Jack M. 2004. ‘Leonardo, Mona Lisa and *La Gioconda*. Reviewing the Evidence’. *Artibus et Historiae*, 25, 50: 17-38, and Zöllner 2006.

<sup>257</sup> However, the *Mona Lisa* was not on display as the Louvre was closed from 1796 to 1801 whilst undergoing refurbishment. By the time the Louvre reopened, the *Mona Lisa* was hanging on Napoleon’s bedroom wall.

example, in Hubert Robert's imaginary designs for the redecoration of the Grande Galerie at the end of the eighteenth century, the *Mona Lisa* does not feature amongst his selection of the more important works in the collection, whereas Raphael's *Holy Family*, 1518 takes a central position, with Titian's *Entombment of Christ*, 1516, to its immediate right [Fig. 2.46].

In 1809, the painting was cleaned and reframed.<sup>258</sup> By the early 1830s, with the growing interest in the Italian Renaissance and the emergence of the 'cult of Leonardo', the *Mona Lisa* had been moved to the smaller Salon Carré, where the most admired works in the collection were displayed. This transfer marked a significant increase in the painting's popularity. In Samuel F.B. Morse's *The Gallery of the Louvre*, 1833, the *Mona Lisa* can be seen in the lower line of pictures to the right of the doorway<sup>259</sup> [Fig. 2.47]. Though the installation in the Salon Carré is a testament to the painting's increasing prominence within the collection, a more accurate indication of the painting's value can be found in the 1849 edition of the Louvre's official catalogue which includes market valuations of the museum's holdings. In 1849, the *Mona Lisa* was valued at 90,000 francs, an increase of 10,000 francs over its 1815-21 valuation.<sup>260</sup> In comparison, Leonardo's *Virgin of the Rocks* and Titian's *Supper at Emmaus* were both valued at 150,000 francs. Raphael's *Madonna and Child with Saint John the Baptist (La Belle jardinière)* was listed at

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<sup>258</sup> The work was carried out by Jean-Marie Hooghsloot, the Louvre's chief of restoration, who is often blamed for the over-zealous cleaning which removed the sitter's eyebrows.

<sup>259</sup> Morse's painting is not a faithful reproduction of the Salon Carré; he includes only his favourites, to be shown to Americans unable to see the originals. It can still be taken as a sign of the painting's importance in the collection due to its inclusion amongst the other masterpieces such as Titian, Poussin, Rubens, Van Dyck, Rembrandt and Murillo.

<sup>260</sup> Ministère de l'intérieur, ed. Frédéric Villot 1849, 108, as quoted in Sassoon 53-54.

400,000 francs, an increase of 100,000 since the 1821 valuation. Incredibly, Raphael's *Holy Family* was valued at 600,000 francs.<sup>261</sup>

Fearing for the painting's safety during the Franco-Prussian War (July 1870 to May 1871) and the Paris Commune (March 1871 to May 1871) the *Mona Lisa* was moved along with the other pictures from the Salon Carré to the Brest Arsenal. By this time the popularity of the painting was well established in artistic and literary circles. In 1873, Walter Pater wrote the famous description of his *femme fatale*,

She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants: and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary; and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the eyelids and the hands.<sup>262</sup>

However, although the *Mona Lisa* was a popular picture, it was still eclipsed by others in the collection. Between 1850 and 1880 (when photography largely replaced engraving), the *Mona Lisa* was copied seventy-one times. In comparison, Murillo's *Immaculate Conception* was copied 197 times, Correggio's *Mystic Marriage of St Catherine* 186 times, Veronese's *Wedding at Cana* 167 times, and Titian's *Entombment of Christ* 130 times. Even French paintings were more popular, such as Jean Baptiste Greuze's *Cruche cassé* with 138 copies, and Pierre Paul Prud'hon's *L'Assomption de la Vierge* with 130 copies.<sup>263</sup> Recalling Robert's *Design for the*

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<sup>261</sup> Ministère de l'intérieur, ed. Frédéric Villot 1849, 108, as quoted in Sassoon 53-54.

<sup>262</sup> Pater, Walter. 1998. *The Renaissance* (Oxford, Oxford University Press), 79-80. First published 1873.

<sup>263</sup> Dupuy, Marie-Anne. 1993. 'Les Copistes à l'œuvre', in *Copier Créer. De Turner à Picasso: 300 oeuvres inspirées par les maîtres du Louvre* (exhibition catalogue), (Paris, Réunion des Musées Nationaux), 44-47, as cited in Sassoon 2001, 52.

*Grande Galerie in the Louvre*, 1796, [Fig. 2.46], the longevity of prevailing tastes is rather evident. Prominent placement is given to Raphael's *Holy Family*, where a copyist is working from the original in the foreground, and Titian's *Entombment of Christ* can be seen hanging immediately to the right.

Thus, the *Mona Lisa*'s position in the Salon Carré should be read as a statement of its growing importance, but the statistics reaffirm its place and value *amongst*, not above, the other paintings in the room. The *Mona Lisa* can just barely be seen to the left of the turbans of two Moorish visitors in Giuseppe Castiglione's *Vue du Salon Carré au Musée du Louvre*, 1861 [Fig. 2.48]. The visitors to the Salon Carré are depicted undertaking various activities including copying, contemplation or discussion. With the visitor's immaculate dress and impeccable behaviour, this picture embodies the 'ideal' museum experience. The institutional conventions implied by the museum setting are the standard to which the *nouvelle bourgeoisie* would be held from the mid nineteenth century onwards.

In Castiglione's picture, there is a security guard posted at each doorway.<sup>264</sup> Their inclusion is both a reflection of an attempt to capture the 'real' museum, as well as a wider sign that warders were becoming 'part of the furniture' around this time; a standard feature in the museum experience. In this serene setting, however, their presence seems slightly redundant as the visitors in the Castiglione picture stand in drastic contrast to the animated audience in François-Auguste Biard's *Closing*

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<sup>264</sup> It is interesting how, dated 1861, the dark suit and crimson waistcoat worn by the guards appears to be the same colour scheme as that worn by the old Fuzelier in the portrait of c.1805 [Fig. 2.21], suggesting this was the conventional uniform for quite some time. However, Biard's portraits of 1847 [Figs. 2.16 and 2.20] show the colours in reverse: crimson jackets and dark waistcoats.

*Time* and *Four o'clock at the Salon*, both 1847 [Figs. 2.16 and 2.20]. In the tranquil Castiglione image, the iron railing in the Salon Carré is topped by a fringed red cushion. Less a barrier and more an apparatus to rest against, within this aesthetic the railing serves as a signal of encouragement to approach the paintings beyond for closer inspection. With separation negated, the simple component of padding significantly alters the function of the device as well as the expectation of behaviour within the space. Approaching a painting is not forbidden by this audience; in fact, it would be expected of a well-informed visitor if the actions of the well-dressed gentlemen in all three of the previous images are taken into account. It might follow that the removal of this padding, which had occurred by the time of the theft, was a sign that the museum's assumptions about the visiting public had changed; the inviting gesture was replaced by a stark protective barrier.

In François-Auguste Biard's *Four o'clock at the Salon*, [Fig. 2.20] a very mixed demographic is crowded into a room at the Salon as the guards announce the daily closure of the museum. The guards look as bored as the well-dressed gentlemen on the left, one of which stifles a yawn while the other reclines, eyes closed, against both barrier and picture frame behind. No one acknowledges the presence of the guards except for the young girl in the foreground whose mother is caught up in a fit of ecstasy over a painting. Reworking the composition and many of the same figures in *Closing Time*, [Fig. 2.16], these pictures comment on the wider museum public in the nineteenth century and the increasingly affluent bourgeoisie's exaggerated responses to the works in the exhibition. However, the pictures also betray the overly-relaxed attitude towards security not only on behalf of the guards, but by the

better-dressed (men) in the paintings. In *Closing Time*, a gentleman on the right of the image is either reclining obliviously against a painting, or moving out of the way of another man's wild gesturing. He stands next to a third man who rests an arm on a plinth and peers through his monocle not more than an inch or two away from the painting. In addition to a glimpse of the sense of entitlement that the behaviour of the upper classes reveals, these images present a vivid picture of how the increasing attendance levels in the nineteenth century place arts collections in a vulnerable position.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the *Mona Lisa* still hung below Veronese's *Feast in the House of Simon*, 1570, and though by now there was only a single horizontal line of pictures under the large Veronese the painting was still very much nestled amongst other works in the Italian School [Fig. 2.7]. Bérourd's portrait of Frédéric La Guillermie engraving the *Mona Lisa* of 1909 shows the *Mona Lisa* nestled between Titian's *Allegory of Alfonso d'Avalos* c.1532 and Correggio's *Mystical Marriage of Saint Catherine with Saint Sebastian*, 1526-27 [Fig. 2.49]. There was nothing to distinguish it, in terms of display, from surrounding paintings; the *Mona Lisa* was very much a part of a community of works in the Salon Carré. With respect to security, apart from the glazing which had been installed on various other works, the *Mona Lisa* did not have any special security apparatus. It was protected solely by the attention of warders and the iron railing that ran the perimeter of the Salon Carré, just like many other paintings in the room<sup>265</sup> [Figs. 2.2 and 2.49].

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<sup>265</sup> For some reason, Bérourd chose to obscure the railing in *Mona Lisa au Louvre*, 1911 [Fig. 2.1] which was painted just before the theft; whereas it appears quite clearly in his other works, particularly in that of Frédéric La Guillermie *preparing an engraving of the Mona Lisa*, 1909 [Fig. 2.49].



The presence of uncomplicated security measures can be attributed to the reactive nature of museum security at the turn of the century. As evidenced by the findings of this thesis, historically it takes an accident or criminal act to occur before changes are made to the security and display of valuable objects. Images depicting the Salon Carré before 1911 visually illustrate how museum practice was focussed on the protection of objects from accidental damage and vandals but not from theft. That the *Mona Lisa* had been stolen on a day when the museum was closed to the public rendered the current security measures redundant and, as previously discussed, forced a reconsideration of museum practice. The operational changes that mainly included further training and an increased presence of warders (including days closed to the public) had little impact on the condition of display at the Louvre following the theft. The exhibition of the empty space, though significant for its theoretical and museological implications, did not trigger a reorganisation of museum space. This would come later however, when the painting was recovered. As will be shown, an incremental alteration of space that would gradually increase the distance between viewer and object began following the recovery of the painting, producing a distinct parallel with the escalating institutional prominence of the *Mona Lisa*.

## **II. Recovery of the *Mona Lisa*: 1913**

On 29 November 1913 Alfredo Geri, an antique dealer in Florence, received a letter signed by ‘Leonard’ who sought to restore the *Mona Lisa* to Italy as

compensation for works of art stolen from Italy by Napoleon.<sup>266</sup> Geri notified Giovanni Poggi, a curator at the Uffizi Gallery, and Director of Fine Arts Dr. Corrado Ricci who encouraged Geri to arrange a meeting. ‘Leonard’, who turned out to be the thief Vincenzo Peruggia, took a train from Paris to Florence and met with the aforementioned at the Hotel Tripoli on 12 December. They convinced Peruggia to accompany them to the Uffizi to further examine the painting. Geri and Poggi examined the *cracquelures* against a photograph of the original and once they were convinced it was authentic, told Peruggia to return to his hotel to await his reward.<sup>267</sup> They notified the police who arrested Peruggia at his hotel and the news spread rapidly thereafter. In a photograph taken when the painting arrived at the Uffizi, Poggi can be seen standing to the left of the *Mona Lisa*. The painting was placed in a sixteenth-century frame for its display [Fig. 2.50].

The format of the headlines in the press echoed the disappearance of the painting two years earlier; images (some now in colour) of the *Mona Lisa* dominated the front pages of newspapers as journalists printed effusive descriptions of the painting and dramatised the relatively straightforward recovery. In an interview on his role in the recovery, Ricci matched the tone of the papers. He claimed he identified the object by recognizing the number and seal of the Louvre on the back of the panel and by the ‘sovereign beauty of the celebrated painting’.<sup>268</sup> A heightened sense of anticipation was fuelled by these reports, and an arrangement was agreed whereby the painting would be exhibited in Florence, Rome and Milan before returning to Paris. This arrangement was an astute diplomatic decision; it

<sup>266</sup> ‘Find “Mona Lisa”, Arrest Robber’, *The New York Times*, 13 December 1913.

<sup>267</sup> Peruggia wanted 500,000 *lire* to cover ‘expenses’.

<sup>268</sup> ‘Find “Mona Lisa”, Arrest Robber’, *The New York Times*, 13 December 1913.

simultaneously relieved French fears that Italy would inhibit or deny the return of the painting to Paris while ensuring the Italian public would have the chance to see the famous work on its country of origin.

The exhibitions of the *Mona Lisa* that followed its recovery brought unprecedented attendance numbers to each location when displayed. In contrast to the display of the empty space at the Louvre in 1911, these exhibitions demonstrated an object-based security focus which had to be balanced against a high volume of visitors. In that the theft added to the exclusivity of the *Mona Lisa*, the security measures arranged for these displays were an outward expression of enhanced object protection that reinforced the increased value placed upon the painting. To install the painting for public display, it was carried into Room Four (portraiture) of the Uffizi Gallery in Florence by two custodians from the Cabinet of Gems in a procession of officials including Ricci and Poggi. Noted by *The New York Times*, ‘The artists, journalists, and others present instinctively uncovered as the picture was carried past them’.<sup>269</sup> These historic exhibitions mark the introduction of the singular treatment that would continue to be associated with the *Mona Lisa*.

The *Mona Lisa* was first put on display from 14 to 19 December 1913 at the Uffizi. The abovementioned article states that this first public exhibition assumed the proportions of a riot. It claimed, ‘At an early hour an immense throng of all classes gathered outside the doors of the gallery under the arcade, which was guarded by the police, who were frequently thrust aside by the excited populace.’<sup>270</sup> The *Rome Tribune* reported,

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<sup>269</sup> ‘Florentines In Riot Over “Mona Lisa”’, *The New York Times*, 15 December 1913.

<sup>270</sup> ‘Florentines In Riot Over “Mona Lisa”’, *The New York Times*, 15 December 1913.

Yes, everywhere it's the 'Gioconda'. Florence seems the apotheosis of beauty. No word is spoken but 'Gioconda'. Nothing is sought but 'Gioconda'. Nothing else takes place but talk of seeing how long "Gioconda's" Italian journey will last and the pleasure of seeing it again. Yesterday, 30,000 people went to the Uffizi. Today, how many? 10,000, 20,000 – who knows. The lire does not frighten the parsimonious Florentines. It is worth recording that everyone was happy to spend money in order to say that in their homeland they were able to get nearer to the divine smile. Perugia has not only made the Louvre happy but he has also brought a benefit to Italian art. The Uffizi has had, or in a few days will have, more visitors than it normally has in a month.<sup>271</sup>

Restrictive viewing conditions were required to handle the 30,000 visitors who attended the gallery before its closure at 13:00, while 'thousands of others went away disappointed'.<sup>272</sup> The public were permitted to enter in parties of 100, with women first. The *Mona Lisa* was placed upon an easel draped in a dark cloth and set behind what looks to be wooden benches facing inwards to serve as a balustrade [Fig. 2.51]. Four gendarmes were permanently stationed by the painting, emphasizing the clear demarcation of the space allocated exclusively to the object. Furthermore, visitors were only allowed to spend three minutes in the room, 'the Director of the gallery [Poggi] all the while exhorting them to be calm'.<sup>273</sup>

The *Mona Lisa* was transferred from Florence to Rome on 20 December 1913 in a train carriage exclusively reserved for the painting and a large accompaniment of French and Italian officials; police were stationed at all stops along the route. The painting received the same transit security reserved for the Italian royal family.<sup>274</sup> Arriving first at the Ministry of Fine Arts for a private viewing including King Victor Emmanuel, cabinet ministers, senators, deputies, members of the diplomatic corps

<sup>271</sup> 'Gioconda Enthusiasm in Florence', *Tribune* (Rome), 15 December 1913.

<sup>272</sup> 'Florentines In Riot Over "Mona Lisa"', *The New York Times*, 15 December 1913.

<sup>273</sup> 'Florentines In Riot Over "Mona Lisa"', *The New York Times*, 15 December 1913.

<sup>274</sup> "'Mona Lisa's" Royal Honors', *The New York Times*, 21 December 1913.

and their families, the *Mona Lisa* was transferred to the Borghese Museum the following day, received officially by the French Ambassador to Italy, and put on public display. At the Borghese, extra police were required to help with the large crowds and once again viewing had to be restricted; only 200 people were allowed in the museum at a time [Fig. 2.52]. On the last day of its exhibition in Rome, 5,000 people came to view the *Mona Lisa* and it was reported that several women fainted in the crush of the crowd.<sup>275</sup> When the Borghese closed that evening, the crowd refused to disperse and troops were required to clear the streets.<sup>276</sup>

From Florence the painting was moved to Milan, arriving on 29 December 1913. Much like its exhibition in Florence and Rome, great crowds gathered at the Brera Gallery and 200 police officers and officials were reported to have had difficulty preserving order.<sup>277</sup> This was likely the reason for the removal of the *Mona Lisa* to a larger exhibition hall within the gallery late in the afternoon on the first day of its exhibition. Of further note is that the opening hours of the gallery were extended until midnight while on display in Milan. A postcard by illustrator Yves Polli depicts the arrival of the *Mona Lisa* in Milan, surrounded by jubilant crowds, in a carriage driven by a frustrated Leonardo da Vinci [Fig. 2.53]. A few weeks later, an identical postcard appeared with the Eiffel tower replacing Milan Cathedral in the background [Fig. 2.54]. The unprecedented attendance levels, restrictive viewing conditions, crowd control measures, and extended opening hours make up the components of the modern blockbuster exhibition phenomenon, but appear here, more than half a century beforehand.

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<sup>275</sup> "Throngs see 'Mona Lisa'", *The New York Times*, 28 December 1913.

<sup>276</sup> "Throngs see 'Mona Lisa'", *The New York Times*, 28 December 1913.

<sup>277</sup> "Milan Sees 'Mona Lisa'", *The New York Times*, 30 December 1913.

The *Mona Lisa* arrived in Paris on 31 December 1913 and was brought to the École des Beaux Arts for a private viewing by officials and journalists. Hung in the ‘Hall of Honour’, the painting was again heavily guarded and set against a backdrop of the government’s Gobelin tapestries [Fig. 2.55]. The following day viewing was opened to the public and an admission fee was charged; the money from which was to be distributed among the Italian poor in Paris in recognition of Italy’s part in the recovery of the painting.<sup>278</sup>

The exhibitions of the painting and its journey from Italy to France were an exercise in diplomacy; the reporting of the topic imbued the official gestures and transport arrangements with an importance accorded to royal or state occasions. The media was saturated with subtle messages that inadvertently transferred the reverence of the object and occasion to the physical space it inhabited. In Rome, the French Ambassador thanked officials for their participation in the recovery of the painting. He said that the French Government and the French people would ‘feel the deepest gratitude for the promptitude of the Italian Government and its generosity in desiring to return the masterpiece to the Salon Carré in the Louvre, rendered historic and sacred by its presence’.<sup>279</sup> The immense public interest surrounding the theft and subsequent recovery of the *Mona Lisa* meant that the Louvre faced the daunting prospect of exhibiting an object that was likely to draw unprecedented crowds. They made their position on security quite clear:

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<sup>278</sup> ‘Paris welcomes the “Mona Lisa”’, *The New York Times*, 1 January 1914. The exhibition at the École des Beaux Arts raised 3,500 francs according to *Le Petit Parisien*, 4 January 1914 (See “‘La Joconde’ a réintégré son domicile légal”).

<sup>279</sup> ‘Find “Mona Lisa”, Arrest Robber’, *The New York Times*, 13 December 1913.

We shall return 'La Joconde' to her old place of honour in the Salle Carré after the New Year, but shall take no extra precautions against theft. Owing to the new system of supervision, thefts are now impossible.<sup>280</sup>

Considering the disastrous reputation Louvre guards had gained following the theft, this statement is likely more an exercise in public relations than a true indicator of the museum's confidence in museum security. It also underlines how museum security in 1913 is still very dependent on the organisation and diligence of guards as opposed to complex apparatus. Apart from the increased numbers of guards, dogs for the night patrol, and a refitting of the museum's locks, no structural changes took place and alarms had not yet been introduced. The above statement does, however, contradict the great lengths the Louvre went to in the temporary reorganisation of space and measures implemented for security purposes for the exhibition of the newly recovered painting. Though not permanent, this new organisation of space indicates awareness on behalf of the Louvre that 'normal' procedure would no longer apply to the display of the *Mona Lisa*.

On 4 January 1914 the *Mona Lisa* was installed back in the Salon Carré, just as the Louvre stated. However, the museum was completely reconfigured to accommodate the expectation of an immense amount of visitors. On that day, more than 100,000 people came to see the painting.<sup>281</sup> Alterations to the museum for the sole purpose of the display of the *Mona Lisa* included re-routing visitor flow to follow a single direction. A photograph of visitors lined up before the 'special entrance' reserved for visitors to the *Mona Lisa* was published in *Le Petit Parisien*;

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<sup>280</sup> 'Paris Plans Fete for *Mona Lisa*', *The New York Times*, 20 December 1913.

<sup>281</sup> Esterow 1973, 172.

entrance to the museum was restricted to the Place du Carrousel<sup>282</sup> [Fig. 2.56]. Upon entering from the Place du Carrousel, visitors were led into the Louvre and up the Daru staircase to the *Winged Victory of Samothrace*. Turning right at the sculpture, the processional flow brought visitors through two rooms into the Salon Carré to pass before the *Mona Lisa*, exiting into the Grand Galerie to return back down the Daru staircase. A further testament to the tightly controlled conditions, the staircase had been divided by a rope barrier to separate ascending from descending traffic.

Within the Salon Carré, an initial barrier was fixed to the floor and draped in red cloth, set a metre or two from the painting with guards stationed alongside [Fig. 2.57]. As can be seen in this image, a second barrier, also fixed to the floor and draped in cloth was set ten yards back, forming a corridor for a procession of visitors diagonally across the room from one entrance to another. On 4 January 1914 *Le Petit Parisien* reported that the purpose of the second barrier was to separate the crowd from the ‘privileged’ visitors who were able to view the painting from the corridor between barriers.<sup>283</sup> Finding no other supporting evidence of this statement, it is difficult to comment further upon the idea of a segregation of visitors within the Salon Carré, however interesting the concept may be, especially in contrast to the socially diverse audience that congregated around the empty space in 1911. It also seems logical that the rest of the room was blocked off to ensure a timely flow of visitors through the museum, while reducing the area that the guards had to monitor. Keeping in mind that admission was not charged for this exhibition, it seems unlikely that the museum felt the need to open the rest of the space. The exhibition had a

<sup>282</sup> ‘Au Louvre, les Parisiens ont defilé devant la “Joconde”’, *Le Petit Parisien*, 5 January 1914.

<sup>283</sup> ‘La “Joconde” a réintégré son domicile légal’, *Le Petit Parisien*, 4 January 1914.



single focus, the display of the *Mona Lisa* to the public following its recovery, and the alterations to the Louvre heightened the sense of anticipation with the special entrance, the processional flow through the museum dictated by ropes and barriers (including a dramatic ascent and descent on the Daru staircase) and the obvious presence of security.<sup>284</sup>

The significant attention given to security in the reporting following the recovery of the *Mona Lisa* demonstrates the emergence of museum security as a matter of public interest. To better understand this interest it is useful to consider how the *Mona Lisa* transcended the exclusive domain of fine art (via the theft) and captured international attention. These celebratory exhibitions paralleled widespread nationalistic undercurrents just six months before the outbreak of World War I. The loss of the Italian painting by France, its recovery in its native country, the spectacular exhibitions and dramatic return of the *Mona Lisa* to France by Italy illustrated that the painting was much more than an object of artistic importance and its future security measures are an institutional reflection of this acknowledgement.

### **III. Post-theft critical reception of the *Mona Lisa***

At some point shortly following the initial exhibition of the *Mona Lisa* the barriers were removed and the Salon Carré was returned to its previous condition. Sir William Nicholson's *The Return of the Mona Lisa*, 1914, depicts crowds congregating around the *Mona Lisa* in the Salon Carré from a vantage point on the

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<sup>284</sup> Municipal guards and police officers, some in plain clothes, stood outside the Louvre to manage the crowds and provide assistance to the security warders inside.

opposite side of the room<sup>285</sup> [Fig. 2.58]. Unlike the other visitors who are focussed solely on the *Mona Lisa*, a man in the foreground faces the viewer, contemplating (he may be sketching or taking notes) a work above. This solitary figure draws attention to the fact that the other works in the room have been forgotten, overshadowed by the *Mona Lisa* and its growing legacy. The unprecedented attention would have a problematic effect on its critical reception which continues to present day.

The return of the *Mona Lisa* was front-page news, but even by the time of its exhibition at the Louvre the subject had fallen to subsequent pages or was not mentioned at all in the Parisian dailies.<sup>286</sup> Brief pieces followed Peruggia's trial in Rome, where he was sentenced to thirteen months in prison but released upon appeal after serving seven months.<sup>287</sup> Moreover, the prolific reporting surrounding the theft and recovery of the *Mona Lisa* also had an impact on the painting's critical reception and scholarly attention. Questions about the authenticity and quality of the painting in both popular and academic spheres quickly emerged following the theft. A prevalent theory was that the theft was a publicity stunt on behalf of the Louvre. It was suggested that the Louvre was covering up some sort of in-house accidental damage to the painting.<sup>288</sup> The extent of these types of claims caused Sir Lionel

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<sup>285</sup> Sir William Nicholson (1872 – 1949) was an artist and illustrator, including children's books such as *The Velveteen Rabbit* (1922) by Margery Williams. His portrait of J.M. Barrie (1904) hangs in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. He is also the father of English abstract painter Ben Nicholson (1894 – 1982).

<sup>286</sup> See *Le Petit Journal*, *Le Petit Parisien*, *Le Figaro*, and *Le Matin* for instance.

<sup>287</sup> Vincenzo Peruggia returned to Italy, served in the Italian Army during World War I, operated a paint store, and died on his forty-fourth birthday in 1925. His death was missed by the media, but an obituary mistakenly appeared in 1947 when another man by the same name died.

<sup>288</sup> For more on the Louvre cover-up conspiracy, see Blas, Gil. 'Repeat "Mona Lisa" Was Never Stolen: Louvre Guardians Declare a Photographer Injured It and Fears to Confess'. *The New York*

Henry Cust (Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures) to issue a criticism of the salacious reporting of the theft in 1915:

There seems to be some need of an apology for mentioning once more in *The Burlington Magazine* this world-famous picture. Famous as it was before, the ravishment of *Mona Lisa* and subsequent restitution to the Louvre, a squalid story in itself, brought the picture into the domain of the cheap and shallow journalist ready to make copy for business purposes of any information good or bad, true or false, which might help to keep the subject alive in public curiosity.<sup>289</sup>

Cust condemned the subsequent academic attacks of the *Mona Lisa*. 'The publicity attached to the theft of *Mona Lisa* from the Louvre led to further literary activity on the part of earnest young students eager to make their own reputation by destroying that of some famous work of art'.<sup>290</sup> The compulsion to publish just about anything on the subject seemed to bring questionable scholarship to the foreground. One article reported on a lecture at the University of London by Kane S. Smith entitled, 'Beauty and Morality' in which he called the *Mona Lisa* 'one of the most actively evil pictures ever painted, the embodiment of all evil the painter could imagine put into the most attractive form he could devise'.<sup>291</sup> A year before the theft an article was published claiming that the *Mona Lisa* had been stolen, a copy was put in its place, and the original sold to an American millionaire.<sup>292</sup> Questions over the authenticity of the painting were widespread over the theft, prompting Louvre

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*Times*, 3 March 1912, and Littlefield, Walter. 'Priceless "Mona Lisa" Ruined By Restorers, Not Stolen? Documentary Evidence Tends to Show That Leonardo's Masterpiece Was Destroyed in an Effort to Fix it Up, and Was Not Carried Off by Thieves'. *The New York Times*, 6 July 1913.

<sup>289</sup> Cust, Lionel. October 1915. 'Mona Lisa'. *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 28, 51: 29. Cust was Director of the National Portrait Gallery from 1895 to 1909 and Surveyor of the Queen's Pictures from 1901 to 1927.

<sup>290</sup> Cust 1915, 29-30.

<sup>291</sup> 'The "Mona Lisa" Defamed', *The New York Times*, 1 December 1913.

<sup>292</sup> An article was published in the *Cri de Paris* in 1910 as part of a campaign to induce Louvre authorities to keep a better watch over their treasures in light of the recent claims of theft and vandalism.

curator M. Le Prieur to claim, ‘I have studied the picture for years, mounted and unmounted, know every minor detail of it, and would recognize a copy, however perfect, after five minutes’ observation’.<sup>293</sup>

In much the same way that the Louvre and its security came under attack by the media, these reports were also looking for anything to print to keep the subject in the news and subjects such as authenticity and mysterious identity of the sitter were particularly popular. With a reproduction of the painting on the front page of almost every newspaper, and at least an article every few weeks for the entire time the painting was missing, it is understandable that a sense of ‘*Mona Lisa* fatigue’ emerged. When the *Mona Lisa* was recovered it had to once again be included in the Louvre catalogue. Recounting a request for a new caption, curator Seymour de Ricci stated,

I have been asked for a new description of the picture but I prefer never, never to speak about her anymore. She will be a nightmare to every Curator. She has come back but perhaps she will be gone again before the second edition of the catalogue comes out.<sup>294</sup>

Rather poignantly, Theodore Rousseau, curator and Vice Director at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, claimed, ‘to enjoy the *Mona Lisa* a man of the twentieth century must be capable of putting out of his mind everything he has ever read about it.’<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> ‘“La Gioconda” is Stolen in Paris’, *The New York Times*, 23 August 1911.

<sup>294</sup> ‘Trying to Figure “Mona Lisa’s” Value’, *The New York Times*, 25 January, 1914.

<sup>295</sup> Rorimer, James and Theodore Rousseau. February 1963. *Bulletin on Mona Lisa* (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art).

#### IV. The security of the *Mona Lisa* during World Wars I and II

Just as the theft of the *Mona Lisa* as a matter of public interest was replaced by the sinking of the Titanic in April 1912, its return was overshadowed by the events leading up to the First World War. By August 1914, France had declared war and the Louvre was closed to the public. Fortunately no damage was sustained and in a refurbishment following the war the *Mona Lisa* was moved to the Salle des États and re-hung above a marriage chest, flanked by two busts upon pedestals, and set between two smaller portraits<sup>296</sup> [Fig. 2.59]. A rope barrier further separated the distance from the objects. This hang would remain until the outbreak of World War II.

Beginning in 1938, the threat of war prompted a large-scale evacuation of public collections in Europe. The storage sites chosen for the Louvre's collection were châteaux in the French countryside, selected far from strategic targets to escape the danger of bombing. The *Mona Lisa* left the Louvre on 28 August 1939 but it was not until 3 September, when war had been declared, that a decision was taken to ensure that the rest of the 'most precious works' would leave the premises by the end of the day.<sup>297</sup> That the *Mona Lisa* was the first object to be evacuated from the Louvre, well ahead of others, powerfully reinforces its hierarchical status within the museum. Furthermore, unlike other objects, the *Mona Lisa* was kept in several locations during the war. It was moved first to Château de Chambord, then

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<sup>296</sup> To the left is Mino da Fiesole, *Bust of Dietisalvi Neroni*, 1464. To the right, Circle of Desiderio da Settignano, *St. Constance*, or '*La Belle Florentine*', from the third quarter of the fifteenth century.

<sup>297</sup> Fonkenell, Guillaume, 'The Louvre During the War: Photographs 1938 – 1947', exhibition press release, [http://www.louvre.fr/media/repository/ressources/sources/pdf/src\\_document\\_54970\\_en\\_v2\\_m56577569831235784.pdf](http://www.louvre.fr/media/repository/ressources/sources/pdf/src_document_54970_en_v2_m56577569831235784.pdf). Exhibition ran 7 May – 31 August 2009 at the Louvre.

Louvigny, the Abbaye de Loc Dieu in Aveyron, the Musée Ingres in Montauban and finally to Montal, with the Louvre's other paintings. Great care was taken in arranging safe travel for the painting, the subject of which featured in the exhibition, 'The Louvre During the War: Photographs 1938 – 1947' at the Louvre from 7 May to 31 August 2009. For example, Fig. 2.60 shows curators and staff examining the *Mona Lisa* upon its return after the war [Fig. 2.60].

Following a renovation after World War II, the Louvre gradually reopened to the public between 1945 and 1947. The *Mona Lisa* was reinstalled in the Salle des États, above the same marriage chest, but without any portraits or busts flanking it [Fig. 2.61]. It was during this condition of display that on 30 December 1956 Hugo Unzaga Villegas, a Bolivian tourist, threw a stone at the *Mona Lisa*, breaking the protective glass and slightly damaging the panel near the sitter's left elbow. A psychiatric report on Villegas by Dr. Gouriou dated 14 January 1957 found that the man was insane, heard strange voices, and had intended to murder Argentinean dictator Juan Perón but went instead for the 'less well protected' *Mona Lisa*.<sup>298</sup>

In 1961, American artist Faith Ringgold visited the *Mona Lisa* at the Louvre with her daughters. The visit became the subject of *Dancing at the Louvre*, 1991 [Fig. 2.62]. The work depicts two women and three children dancing before the *Mona Lisa*, which is purposefully enlarged to match Leonardo's *Virgin and Child*, left, and *Madonna of the Rocks*, right. With a particular awareness of the interest she, as a black woman in the 1960s, raised in the museum when guiding her daughters

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<sup>298</sup> Sassoon 2001, 220. The report, as well as articles collected in connection with the vandalism are located in the folder 'Attentat', in Louvre folder Inv 779.

around the Louvre, Ringgold recounted her experience to her daughter (feminist historian Michele Faith Wallace) in an interview in 2000.

Ringgold: But you didn't want to see the *Mona Lisa* either. Not until the next year when the *Mona Lisa* came to America. We never discussed it anymore after that. And Barbara [Ringgold's second daughter] did a talk for her class. In fact, Barbara did the lecture when they went to the Metropolitan to see the *Mona Lisa*. Barbara is the one who told them, it is really quite smaller than you are going to imagine, and at the Louvre, it wasn't behind velvet ropes and so forth. I think someone had tried to desecrate it. But anyway this painting was separated from the public here. And now when you go there (to the Louvre), it is in a big glass box.

Wallace: I think this may have been the beginning of the big blockbuster shows in the museums with people lined up down the block to get in.

Ringgold: Yeah, because when we got to the *Mona Lisa* in 1961 it was just sitting there like hey, so what.<sup>299</sup>

Both the image and the interview provide a glimpse of the condition of display of the *Mona Lisa* in 1961, which is just before the painting is sent abroad to America for a highly publicised tour. Ringgold notes how the display was fairly relaxed at the Louvre in 1960s as compared to its exhibition in New York where it was 'separated from the public' and is now (in 2000) in a 'big glass box'. The simplicity of her design for *Dancing at the Louvre* (1991) draws a parallel with her recollection of the simplicity of the display of the *Mona Lisa* in 1961. In a picture that is meant to raise questions about racial identity, the dancing figures set against an established mode of display (including the security railing) also confront museological notions of access and exclusivity.

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<sup>299</sup> Wallace, Michele Faith. 2000. 'The *Mona Lisa* Interview with Faith Ringgold'. (Interview) <http://www.faithringgold.com/ringgold/guest.htm> [last accessed 13 June 2011].

## V. The *Mona Lisa* Abroad: 1962-63 and 1974

The 1960s saw an increase in restrictive viewing conditions for the *Mona Lisa* which further highlighted the problematic balance between accessibility and display. This increase manifested itself at the same time that the international market for fine art was booming, with prices surpassing the million-dollar mark following the 1961 Rembrandt sale to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. As the value of individual objects increased, so did museum attendance. Museum security once again faced the challenge of allowing large numbers to see an object while simultaneously protecting it. As will be evidenced, this translated into an increasing separation between object and viewer, and nowhere is this more apparent than in the display of the *Mona Lisa*.

As a personal loan to President Kennedy, French Culture Minister André Malraux arranged for an exhibition of the *Mona Lisa* in the United States, following a promise he had made in Washington, D.C. in May 1962 to First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy. The loan was announced in October 1962, at the heart of Cold War tensions and in the midst of the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the strategic arrangements made for the painting's journey and display echoed international anxieties. France was reluctant to see the painting travel, and headlines denounced Malraux's decision. An article in *Le Figaro* stated, 'During the 400 years this masterpiece has been in France it has never crossed our borders except when a thief took it to Italy in 1911.'



Five years ago, a maniac stoned the *Mona Lisa* and damaged part of the panel. A third aggression is now planned.<sup>300</sup>

In a report on the loan of the *Mona Lisa* to the United States, Head of Conservation Madeleine Hours noted that a new type of packing case was required to minimise vibration and ensure the painting would never come into contact with another surface. It had to be small enough to be easily carried by two men but impossible to be carried by just one, also waterproof and unsinkable in the event the painting came into contact with the sea. Worried about salvage rights of property under maritime law, Hours claimed, ‘I knew that if the liner *France* were to catch fire or to sink the packing case would have to be tossed over the side. So I had the French flag painted on it, to show that it was French property.’<sup>301</sup> Furthermore, Hours demanded that in the case of a labor strike or loss of electricity, she could be connected to a hospital or the Pentagon, as well as having a bank vault with an independent air-conditioning system at her disposal at all times.<sup>302</sup> Her conditions were met.

On 14 December 1962, at the expense of the French Government, the *Mona Lisa* was transported to Le Havre in a well-padded, air-tight, temperature and humidity-controlled aluminium case and placed, alone, in first-class cabin M-79 aboard the *SS France* for its voyage to New York [Fig. 2.63]. Adjoining cabins were occupied by Jean Chatelain, Director of French Museums, and Maurice Serullaz,

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<sup>300</sup> *Le Figaro*, 3 December 1962.

<sup>301</sup> Davis, Margaret Leslie. 2008. *Mona Lisa in Camelot: How Jacqueline Kennedy and Da Vinci's Masterpiece Charmed and Captivated a Nation* (Philadelphia, PA, Da Capo), 83.

<sup>302</sup> Davis 2008, 84.

chief curator of the Louvre. One night during the voyage, someone put women's shoes to be polished outside the door of cabin M-79.<sup>303</sup> On 19 December, the painting arrived at Pier 18 at New York Harbor and was loaded into a van outfitted with ambulance-like springs [Fig. 2.64]. The van was escorted by vehicles carrying armed Secret Service agents and passed through the Lincoln and Baltimore tunnels which had been cleared of all traffic. The painting was delivered to the National Gallery of Art in Washington, where it was locked in a temporary storage vault in the basement. Press were invited to attend a private viewing of the *Mona Lisa* inside the vault [Fig. 2.65] before the painting was unveiled by President Kennedy during an evening gala on 8 January 1963 [Fig. 2.66].

Once on display to the public, the painting was encased behind bulletproof glass and guarded by two U.S. Marine Corps guards with fixed bayonets, at the request of the President of the United States<sup>304</sup> [Fig. 2.67]. Fig. 2.68 shows a group of school children visiting the exhibition in Washington; the Marines can be seen flanking the bullet-proof enclosure of the *Mona Lisa* [Fig. 2.68]. The military presence was a symbolic gesture of the priority that the United States placed upon its responsibility for the painting's security and its high opinion of French culture however, as highlighted by the contrast of the schoolchildren before the marines in the previous image, at times this security was overwhelming. For instance, worried about the increase in temperature in the room from the strong television camera lights, Madeleine Hours (the conservator who accompanied the painting from the

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<sup>303</sup> Lebovics, Herman. 1999. *Mona Lisa's Escort: André Malraux and the Reinvention of French Culture* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press): 20.

<sup>304</sup> 'President Orders Secret Service to Protect Mona Lisa During Visit', *The Washington Post*, 19 December 1962.

Louvre) stepped over the velvet rope barrier to check the temperature-humidity recorder under the glass-enclosed painting. One of the marine guards, probably thinking to stop an act of vandalism, lunged at Hours and his bayonet ripped her gown. Fortunately, a Secret Service agent leaped forward and rescued her.<sup>305</sup>

In Washington, 674,000 people visited the *Mona Lisa* at the National Gallery when it was on display from 10 January to 3 February 1963, and opening hours were extended for the first time.<sup>306</sup> Crowds lined up in frigid weather to see the exhibition [Fig. 2.69]. The attendance for this single exhibition figure equalled more than half the National Gallery's usual attendance for a whole year.<sup>307</sup> *Paris-Match* wrote that 11,250 people per day had viewed the painting, giving each one an average of twelve seconds in which to 'see the smile'.<sup>308</sup> According to John Walker, then Director of the National Gallery, Washington, 'more people came to see the painting than had ever attended a football game, prize fight, or a world series'.<sup>309</sup>

When the three-week exhibition in Washington closed, the painting was once again packed into its crate with police, military and secret service escort, for the journey to the Metropolitan Museum in New York. The exhibition in New York opened on 6 February 1963, amidst a citywide newspaper strike. The crowd lined up to see the *Mona Lisa* extended several blocks down Fifth Avenue<sup>310</sup> [Fig. 2.70]. Once inside, visitors were 'marshalled in dense platoons' to be allowed briefly to stand before the painting framed by the gilded Spanish grille in the Medieval

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<sup>305</sup> Lebovics 1999, 12-13.

<sup>306</sup> Leader 2002, 5.

<sup>307</sup> Lebovics 1999, 16.

<sup>308</sup> *Paris-Match*, 19 January 1963.

<sup>309</sup> Lebovics 1999, 20.

<sup>310</sup> Lebovics 1999, 16.

Sculpture Hall of the museum [Fig. 2.71]. In New York, visitors were allowed a maximum three minutes in front of the painting.<sup>311</sup>

At the Metropolitan Museum in New York, more than one million visitors attended to see the painting in less than a month from 6 February to 4 March 1963.<sup>312</sup> *The New Yorker* reported that visitors took an average of four seconds each to contemplate the *Mona Lisa* (and compared this to the four years Leonardo's careful *sfumato* had taken).<sup>313</sup> In just under two months, a total of 1,751,521 'mostly American viewers – many of whom had never before visited a museum or art gallery – came to pay homage to the Renaissance creation brought to them under the aegis of France'.<sup>314</sup>

Representatives of France and the United States agreed that no admission or viewing fee would be charged in both New York and Washington, but the public would not be admitted until 7 February so that the opening day could be reserved for special guests and a dinner given by French Ambassador Hervé Alphand.<sup>315</sup> The dinner signified that the loan was more than just an cultural exchange between a French state museum to an American one (extended to the private Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York), as the invitation stated prominently that the painting had been 'lent by the Government of the French Republic to the President of the

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<sup>311</sup> Leader, p.175.

<sup>312</sup> The millionth visitor, a Mr Arthur Pomerantz of New Rochelle, was given a reproduction of the painting and his two daughters each received special booklets. Leader 2002, 5.

<sup>313</sup> *The New Yorker*, 9 February 1963.

<sup>314</sup> Lebovics, 1999, 20.

<sup>315</sup> Lebovics 1999, 16-17.

United States and the American People'.<sup>316</sup> A further indication of the loan's location in a political sphere was evidenced when United Nations Secretary General U Thant and other UN officials, not invited to sit at the head table with the American and French guests, 'suddenly developed various indispositions and did not attend'.<sup>317</sup> Similar to the politicised displays of security that followed the exhibitions of the newly recovered *Mona Lisa* in 1913, the treatment of the painting by United States may have been a demonstration to France of its military and economic prowess at a time when the two nations were at great unease with one another over Charles de Gaulle's eagerness to develop nuclear weapons. Whilst the security of the painting was an acknowledgement of the artistic and cultural significance of the work, the political undertones of the exhibitions in Washington and New York cannot be overlooked.

It was de Gaulle's successor Georges Pompidou who agreed to send the *Mona Lisa* to Japan where it was exhibited at the Tokyo National Museum from 17 April to 11 June 1974, stopping in Moscow for a further exhibition. Travelling by air, in a specially-constructed bullet-proof casing, the painting was sent to the Tokyo National Museum, followed by an eleven-day exhibition at the Pushkin Museum in Moscow which was the result of a last-minute request by Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev. Even though the *Mona Lisa* returned safely to the Louvre in 1963, several curators at the Louvre protested about the travel plans for the fragile painting by

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<sup>316</sup> 'Protocole à soumettre à l'approbation du Gouvernement français et du Gouvernement des Etats-Unis'. 1963. Dossier Correspondence, *Mona Lisa* Exhibition, Item 13 (Archives, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York). As cited in Lebovics 1999, 17-18.

<sup>317</sup> 'UN Officials Snub Mona Lisa', *The Washington Post*, 8 February 1963, A3.

resigning however, their resignations were not accepted.<sup>318</sup> The *Japan Times* reported that 18,881 people per day viewed the painting.<sup>319</sup> The public eagerly consumed souvenirs and memorabilia in the approaching months to the exhibition and the image was widely used in advertising [Fig. 2.72 and 2.73]. Whereas visitors in New York were said to have three minutes to view the *Mona Lisa*, according to *Le Monde* and *Le Figaro*, Japanese authorities had allowed just ten seconds per person to view the painting<sup>320</sup> [Figs. 2.74 and 2.75]. Horrifyingly, to increase the pace of viewers at the exhibition, Japanese museum authorities banned wheelchairs, crutches, walking sticks and Zimmer frames.<sup>321</sup> It would seem that the concept of accessibility in the Japan exhibition was interpreted as trying to get as many people as possible to view the painting. The decision to increase ‘accessibility’ by inhibiting less-able bodied viewers is perhaps one of the most shocking measures undertaken in the history of museum display. Not unsurprisingly, protests subsequently erupted and one handicapped woman sprayed paint on the *Mona Lisa*’s protective glass in defiance of the rule. After this incident, one day was set aside for the disabled.<sup>322</sup>

It would seem that the journey of the *Mona Lisa* to the United States in 1962 paved the way for the loan of another high-value, never-before-travelled masterpiece. In 1964, the Vatican loaned Michelangelo’s *Pietà*, 1499, to the World’s Fair in Flushing Meadows, Queens, New York [Fig. 2.76]. This example draws a parallel with the problematic balance between accessibility and display that follows the *Mona*

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<sup>318</sup> Liebmann, Lisa. 2006. ‘Jackie, JFK and the Art of Diplomacy’, *Tate Etc.*, 6. <http://www.tate.org.uk/tateetc/issue6/monalisa.htm>.

<sup>319</sup> *Japan Times*, 28 April 1974.

<sup>320</sup> *Le Monde*, 20-21 April 1974 and *Le Figaro*, 18 April 1974.

<sup>321</sup> Sassoon 2001, 246.

<sup>322</sup> Sassoon 2001, 246.

*Lisa*. The solution in this instance was to display the sculpture behind a thick bullet-proof glass wall, which was then viewed from a three-tiered steadily moving, mechanised walkway of the sort found in airports [Fig. 2.77]. According to the Endowment for the Preservation of Elevating History, a non-profit charity based in Alabama, the use of the moving walkway was revolutionary.

It would have been difficult for millions to have viewed the revered *Pietà*, quietly, and in an orderly fashion, without the assistance of three tiered moving sidewalks by Stephens-Adamson. No personal contact, shuffling of feet or conversation was evidenced in the Vatican City Pavilion as viewers silently glided past Michelangelo's masterpiece of sculpture.<sup>323</sup>

The above praise for the system reveals much about the assumptions of the visitor that are built into this conveyor-belt viewing experience. In what is perhaps the archetypal example of the ability of security (and technology) to dictate the experience of the viewer, the moving walkway removed the autonomy of the viewer, rendering them completely passive. When considered alongside the short intervals of viewing allocated in the United States and Tokyo, a trend in the reduction in the ability to spend any length of time before an object and an increasing separation between viewer and object emerges.

This trend coincides with what critic Lisa Liebmann called 'the high Pop era, the dawning of the age of art as cultural event, as image-bank asset, coffee-mug logo and museum-shop merchandise'.<sup>324</sup> Or in other words, blockbuster exhibitions. Inherent in these types of exhibitions is the targeting of a large audience with a popular subject, with a commercial marketing strategy to complement ticket sales.

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<sup>323</sup>Sturgeon, William C. 'People in Motion', *The Elevator Museum*, Alabama, The Endowment for the Preservation of Elevating History. <http://www.theelevatormuseum.org/peopleinmotion.php>.

<sup>324</sup> Liebmann 2006.

Rather than seeing this phenomenon as a relatively modern construct, the various exhibitions of the *Mona Lisa* since its theft with their unprecedented crowds and accompanying sales in postcards, memorabilia and souvenirs point to a much earlier inception, but one that is relatively exclusive to this particular object.

Reflecting on the little time each viewer had to see the *Mona Lisa*, Sassoon (2001) draws a parallel to Germain Bazin's concepts of museum and (fleeting) time in *The Museum Age* (1967) and suggests, 'This may seem a little rushed, but it was perhaps sufficient to enable everyone to feel sanctified by the experience, just like medieval pilgrims who, after waiting for hours, were allowed to approach the sacred crypt and behold the holy relics'.<sup>325</sup> Whilst an analogy to pilgrimage is wholly appropriate and the concept suits the history of the display of the *Mona Lisa* from the moment it was stolen, it highlights the way in which restrictive viewing conditions hinder or negate any sort of interaction or appreciation of the object that depends being able to see the materiality of an object at close inspection.<sup>326</sup> These viewing conditions are based upon the assumption that the appreciation of a work, if that is what is sought, can be gained by a quick glimpse. It would seem then, that these modes of display are more likely to present an object as a commodity than a piece of artistic interest, where its commercial value is set upon a dramatic stage for all to see (briefly).

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<sup>325</sup> Bazin, Germain. 1967. *The Museum Age* (Michigan, Universe Books) 277. As cited in Sassoon 2001, 245.

<sup>326</sup> Pointing to a general turn away from material matters at the time, the emergence of these increasingly restrictive viewing conditions coincides with Malraux's concept of a 'museum without walls', whereby photography increases accessibility to art. Critics claimed, however, that materiality could not be replicated digitally. See Malraux, André. 1967. *Museum Without Walls* (London, Secker and Warburg).



Since its return in 1974, the *Mona Lisa* has only moved location once at the Louvre.<sup>327</sup> When it was reinstalled after the Tokyo and Moscow loan, Louvre guards demanded signposts directing visitors to the *Mona Lisa*, the *Venus de Milo* and *Winged Victory of Samothrace* as they felt they were spending too much time directing visitors to these main attractions.<sup>328</sup> It was around this time that mass exhibitions were growing in popularity, increasing the amount of visitors to cultural institutions and in the 1960s the Louvre had one million visitors per year and this increased to nearly three million in the 1980s.<sup>329</sup> Thus the security measures taken to protect the *Mona Lisa* when abroad could hardly be downgraded at the Louvre, where it had already been both stolen and vandalised (once in the Louvre, once in Tokyo). The solution was to integrate the chamber specially constructed for the trip to Tokyo into the permanent display [Fig. 2.78]. This meant that the much-discussed casing that surrounded the *Mona Lisa* throughout the last decades of the twentieth century was in fact a reinforced concrete chamber, fronted with bulletproof glass and tested to withstand numerous physical and environmental threats. As Carol Duncan put it, the *Mona Lisa* was ‘enshrined in a bullet proof case’.<sup>330</sup>

Moreover, the condition of display in the Salle des États further supports the suggestion that security measures reproduce institutional hierarchies. Figs. 2.79 and 2.80 show the dramatic segregation of the *Mona Lisa* in terms of display; the painting is isolated from the other works in the room [Figs. 2.79 and 2.80]. As we

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<sup>327</sup> The *Mona Lisa* was transferred to the Salle Rosa from 2001 to 2005 while the Salle des États was renovated. See Fig. 2.78.

<sup>328</sup> Sassoon 2001, 247.

<sup>329</sup> Sassoon 2001, 248-9.

<sup>330</sup> Duncan and Wallach 1980, 448-49. Reproduced in *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, Bettina Messias Carbonell ed, Oxford, Blackwell, 2004, p. 60, and p. 64, ‘enshrined’ is used again to describe the setting of the *Mona Lisa*, though without the mention of the bullet-proof case.

have seen in this chapter, as the perceived value of the painting increased, its geography in the museum changed. Following the theft, measures were introduced that were unique to this object, even if they were subtle in nature such as the arrangement of furniture to distance viewer and object [Fig. 2.59]. The trips abroad catapulted the painting to an even higher status that was recognised on an international level. The anxieties over the safety of the painting that were strategically built into its security arrangements whilst abroad were transferred back to the Louvre when those conditions were integrated into the permanent display. A resulting implication was the way in which the display significantly negated the ability to appreciate the *Mona Lisa* as contemporary or part of the community of its surrounding works.<sup>331</sup> As Philip Fisher (1991) suggests, once naïve objects are ‘resocialised’ in a museum setting in that their previous functions are suppressed as they are converted into art. ‘Each object becomes what it is only as a part of a community of objects in which it exists.’<sup>332</sup> The negation of the process in the case of the *Mona Lisa* would then suggest that the painting has been orphaned by its display.

## VI. The *Mona Lisa* today

As of April 2005, the *Mona Lisa* once again resides in the nineteenth-century Salle des États, after it underwent a four-year renovation at a cost of €4.8 million.

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<sup>331</sup> In Fig. 2.80, note Raphael’s *Baldassare Castiglione* on the lower left, and Correggio’s *Mystic Marriage of St Catherine* on the lower right – the Raphael replaced the *Mona Lisa* while it was missing, and the Correggio hung to its right when it was stolen. The Correggio can also be seen to the left of Fig. 2.59. All of these works hung in close proximity to the *Mona Lisa* since it was put on display at the Louvre.

<sup>332</sup> Fisher, Philip. 1991. ‘Art and the Future’s Past’, *Making and Effacing Art: Modern American Art in a Culture of Museum* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press). Reproduced in *Museum Studies: An Anthology of Contexts*, Bettina Messias Carbonell ed, Oxford, Blackwell, 2004, p. 436.

Nippon Television of Japan paid for the renovation.<sup>333</sup> The painting is behind bulletproof glass, enclosed within a purpose-built wall of its own in perhaps the most dramatic alteration to a single museum room in the twenty-first century. The ‘new room’ was designed by Peruvian architect Lorenzo Piqueras whose concept places the *Mona Lisa* on a freestanding wall that divides the gallery [Figs. 2.81 and 2.82]. The *Mona Lisa* hangs opposite Veronese’s *The Wedding Feast at Cana*, the Louvre’s largest painting at 6.77 by 9.94 metres<sup>334</sup> [Fig. 2.83]. These two works are accompanied by fifty-two other paintings from the Italian Renaissance lining the side walls and the back of the *Mona Lisa*’s freestanding wall.

As we have seen throughout this chapter, since it was stolen the *Mona Lisa* has presented various museological challenges which centre on the problematic balance of accessibility and display. The architecture of the new room had to accommodate the large volume of visitors and weigh this against perceived risks to the paintings in the room. Various statistics suggest that over 1,500 visitors on average pass by the *Mona Lisa* every hour.<sup>335</sup> Whilst the function of the room is improved in that more visitors are able to see the painting at the same time, proximity to the object has been sacrificed. The comments made by Louvre spokespersons to the media upon the reopening of the Salle des États reveal an acknowledgement that the previous display complicated viewing conditions in the

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<sup>333</sup> Incidentally, two and a half percent of the Louvre’s visitors are Japanese. The network, which financed the cleaning of the Sistine Chapel in the 1980s, also committed \$2.2 million to upgrading the gallery displaying the *Venus de Milo*.

<sup>334</sup> In contrast, the *Mona Lisa* measures 77 by 54 centimetres, and is just 13 millimetres wide.

<sup>335</sup> For instance, Antione du Rocher, ‘Mona Gets a Better View’, Culture Kiosque, 6 April 2005, [http://www.culturekiosque.com/art/news/mona\\_lisa.html](http://www.culturekiosque.com/art/news/mona_lisa.html).

museum. According to an article in *Actualité en France*, the magazine of the ministry of Foreign Affairs,

The main objective was to give the six million people who visit the Louvre every year to admire the *Mona Lisa* a better viewing experience while avoiding traffic jams in this section of the museum. In the past, high visitor affluence had blocked access to many masterpieces of Italian painting.<sup>336</sup>

The above statement acknowledges that the crowding around the *Mona Lisa* hindered the opportunity to view surrounding pictures. Therefore, just as the growing iconic status of the painting produced an increasing separation between object and viewer in terms of its display, the ability to view any painting hung in proximity to the *Mona Lisa* was sacrificed as well.

In this respect, the placement of the *Mona Lisa* on its own wall was intended to reduce the congestion affecting surrounding paintings. However, the effectiveness of the new alterations to the room is completely dependent on the arrangement of tensabarriers [Fig. 2.84]. In the original design, Piqueras's crescent-shaped wooden railing is fixed to the ground a sensible few metres from the wall, but the museum's placement of a tensabarrier 20 to 30 feet further behind the railing increases the distance to the object exponentially [Fig. 2.85]. Not only is there a significant loss of detail by the increased separation, but it privileges the space on the other side of the barrier, reproducing an historical division between public and privileged space (such as a choir screen in a church, or a public gallery in a courtroom or legislative assembly). This double barrier evokes the reconfiguration of the Salon Carré in 1914 for the exhibition of the newly recovered *Mona Lisa* where it was suggested in some

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<sup>336</sup> Canetti, Claudine, 'The world's most famous painting has the Louvre all aflutter', *Actualité en France (Ministère des Affaires Étrangères)*, 2005, [http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/article\\_imprim.php3?id\\_article=6824](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/article_imprim.php3?id_article=6824).

reports that the space closer to the painting was reserved for privileged visitors. [Fig. 2.57]

Furthermore, whilst the crescent-shaped barrier (or rather, whatever form the tensabarriers take on a given day) increases the amount of people who can stand in the 'front-row' to view the picture, it certainly has not addressed the problem of overcrowding as the following familiar scene shows [Fig. 2.86]. As can be seen here, the privileged space before the *Mona Lisa* pushes crowds further back against the surrounding pictures, contradicting the stated objectives of the museum. It should be noted that disabled visitors are welcome to approach the fixed barrier in the new display upon presentation to a warder; perhaps a lesson learned from the travesty of the Tokyo exhibition [Fig. 2.87].

The organisation of space in the Salle des États is shrine-like; with an entrance to the room set at a dramatic distance from the object like that in a nave, the ritual of pilgrimage is evoked. No other object is treated in this way, and nothing else interferes visually with the *Mona Lisa*, not even the large Veronese. Because these two objects are placed so that they face one another, a visitor must turn their back on one in order to view the other which was Piqueras's solution to isolating the line of vision<sup>337</sup> [See Figures 2.82 and 2.83]. This arrangement, and the formidable size of the freestanding wall in which the *Mona Lisa* is encased, ensures that the small stature of the painting is never overshadowed by the sheer magnitude of the Veronese. The imposing size of the wall acts as a fortress of protection for the painting as well as an outward statement of its important status. In a sense, the vast

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<sup>337</sup> 'Mona Lisa returns to original Paris digs', *MSNBC.com*, 5 April 2005, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7395967>.

wall compensates for the small statue of the *Mona Lisa*.<sup>338</sup> This projection of status reverberates around the room.

In his essay 'The Problem of Museums' (1923), Paul Valéry likened the museum to a room where ten orchestras played simultaneously, where from all sides of the room the works called out for undivided attention, but where the sense of sight is violated by 'that abuse of space known as a collection'. For Valéry, the museum is a sign of the fact that the arts of painting and sculpture have become orphans, abandoned by the architecture which once housed and gave them meaning as decorative details. Now assembled in this secondary space, each object, jealous and demanding attention, 'kills all the others around it'.<sup>339</sup> As a review of the display of the *Mona Lisa* since 1911 has shown, the ability of this painting to overpower others around has always existed and is exacerbated by increasingly restrictive viewing conditions. As the wall is completely disconnected from the rest of the room, the spatial isolation of the *Mona Lisa* in the new display orphans it from the Louvre's family of Italian paintings.

Strategic planning went into the placement of the two freestanding walls in the Salle États. Piqueras revealed that he was aware that crowds would tend to cluster around the *Mona Lisa* and *The Wedding Feast at Cana* so he placed them as far apart

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<sup>338</sup> This compensation is not unlike the phenomenon of 'short-man syndrome' or the 'Napoleon Complex' where shorter men, including historical figures such as Napoleon, Mussolini and Stalin have been accused of overcompensating for a perceived lack of physical stature by seeking status, power and conquest (or wearing big hats). See Fleming, Nick, 'Short man syndrome is not just a tall story', *The Telegraph*, 13 March 2008. The article is based upon recent research conducted at the University of Groningen, Netherlands. See Klavina, Liga, Abraham P. Buunk, and Thomas V. Pollet. 2011. 'Out-Group Mating Threat and Disease Threat Increase Implicit Negative Attitudes Toward the Out-Group Among Men', *Frontiers in Evolutionary Psychology*, 2: 76..

<sup>339</sup> Valéry, Paul. 1923. 'Le Problème des Musées', *Pièces sur l'art*, II:1291.

as possible, which translated to a distance of 28 metres. This distance equals the length of the refectory of the Benedictine monastery of San Giorgio Maggiore, Venice, which was the location for which *The Wedding Feast at Cana* was commissioned in 1563.<sup>340</sup> The contract engaging Veronese was extremely precise; the monks insisted that the work be monumental, in order to fill the entire end wall of the refectory. Hung at a height of 2.5 meters from the ground, it was designed to create an illusion of extended space.<sup>341</sup> The current placement of the painting reinforces this illusion as well. By contrast, the hang of the *Mona Lisa* is not at all in keeping with its original function as an intimate portrait.

In a BBC interview covering the new room for the *Mona Lisa*, Louvre sixteenth-century Italian Art curator Cecile Scaillerez stated, ‘The painting abolishes the distance between the model and the viewer by getting rid of a foreground, which created a barrier in pictures of the time’.<sup>342</sup> In acknowledging that the painting was meant to be viewed in close proximity, this is a fitting example of the contradiction between theory and practice. The above statement indicates that the curator would hope that viewers would be able to appreciate the absence of a foreground in the painting because it presented a *barrier* in contemporary pictures. The ability to experience the absence of the foreground barrier is completely negated by the spatial

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<sup>340</sup> Canetti, Claudine, ‘The world’s most famous painting has the Louvre all aflutter’, *Actualité en France (Ministère des Affaires Étrangères)*, 2005, [http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/article\\_imprim.php3?id\\_article=6824](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/article_imprim.php3?id_article=6824).

<sup>341</sup> François, Aline, ‘*The Wedding Feast at Cana*’, Caption to the painting on the Louvre’s website, [http://www.louvre.fr/llv/oeuvres/detail\\_notice.jsp?CONTENT%3C%3Ecnt\\_id=10134198673225111&CURRENT\\_LL\\_V\\_NOTICE%3C%3Ecnt\\_id=10134198673225111&FOLDER%3C%3Efolder\\_id=9852723696500816&bmLocale=en](http://www.louvre.fr/llv/oeuvres/detail_notice.jsp?CONTENT%3C%3Ecnt_id=10134198673225111&CURRENT_LL_V_NOTICE%3C%3Ecnt_id=10134198673225111&FOLDER%3C%3Efolder_id=9852723696500816&bmLocale=en). Last accessed 1 June 2011.

<sup>342</sup> ‘*Mona Lisa* Gains New Louvre Home’, *BBC News*, 6 April 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/arts/4413303.stm>.

arrangement of the room whereby visitors now stand at least 20 to 30 feet away from the *Mona Lisa*, which is of course behind thick bulletproof glass, and are lucky if they can make out a general description of the portrait. Paradoxically, viewers can stand less than a metre from Veronese's *The Wedding Feast at Cana*, which is better viewed from a distance. Moreover, the crowd trying to catch a glimpse of the *Mona Lisa* is usually so large that it intrudes into the space designed for viewing *The Wedding Feast at Cana*.

A further example of the Louvre's intention for the *Mona Lisa* to be considered within a wider context is found in an interview in *The New York Times*. A Louvre spokesperson stated,

As part of the reorganization, the museum hopes to do more than better manage the flow of its 6.6 million visitors, half of them foreigners. It also wants the painting to be understood in its historical and artistic context and not merely as another 'must see' of Paris.<sup>343</sup>

In contradiction of the stated objective, the current theatrical setting of the painting goes even further in isolating it from other works and in doing so foregrounds its hierarchical status in the room. No other painting has such a vast space between it and its audience which reinforces the idea that the spatial organisation of the room centres on the location of the *Mona Lisa*. This exclusive space not only sets the painting above others in the room, but the distance across which the public must gaze is so great that an analysis of the detail in the painting is impossible. Thus, the painting is presented less as an object to be considered in terms of its artistic and historical importance and more as a 'spectacle', another 'must-see' of Paris.

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<sup>343</sup> Riding, Allan, 'In Louvre, New Room with a View of *Mona Lisa*', *New York Times*, 6 April 2005. <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/06/arts/design/06lisa.html>.



On balance, the renovation and subsequent transfer of the painting allowed for an updated scientific assessment of its condition and improvements to environmental conditions. The government-operated French Museums' Centre for Research and Restoration found no new evidence of deterioration. It said that the wood panel remains slightly warped but that the work's surface is in good condition and that a 4.3 inch crack from the top of the panel to the sitter's hair has not grown.<sup>344</sup> Furthermore, in a slight compensation for the greater viewing distance, the clarity of the painting has been greatly enhanced by precise lighting and improved glazing. According to the exhibition designers, a tiny spotlight on the shelf in front of the painting compensates for reflection and is intended to bring out colours that were lost in the darker display of the past [Fig. 2.88]. Piqueras claimed, 'You can also see the red in the sleeves and in the road in the background, which you couldn't before'.<sup>345</sup> Piqueras conceded that the non-reflective, unbreakable glass surrounding the painting did give slight reflections at certain angles, but still felt it was 'the best in the world'. The room is positioned ideally, running north to south and a triangular glass roof was built over the skylight so that sun gives even light much of the day and computer-controlled artificial lighting adjusts to fill in where needed<sup>346</sup> [Fig. 2.89]. The culmination of high-tech security and cutting-edge environmental improvements were tested on 2 August 2009 when a Russian woman, distraught over being denied French citizenship, threw a mug purchased from the gift shop at the

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<sup>344</sup> Riding, Allan, 'In Louvre, New Room with a View of *Mona Lisa*', *New York Times*, 6 April 2005. <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/04/06/arts/design/06lisa.html>.

<sup>345</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/arts/story/2005/04/06/MonaLisa-050406.html> [Article is no longer accessible]

<sup>346</sup> 'Mona Lisa returns to original Paris digs', *MSNBC.com*, 5 April 2005, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7395967>.

*Mona Lisa*. The mug shattered against the glass enclosure but the painting was entirely protected and undamaged.

### **Conclusion**

It is hoped that the case study of the *Mona Lisa* has deepened the understanding behind a century of unprecedented security measures surrounding the world's most famous painting and drawn attention to the museological implications of theft by examining the paradoxical motivations built into museum security. Prior to the theft, the *Mona Lisa* was an object that was defined amongst a community of contemporary Italian paintings in the Louvre. Once stolen, the theft resonated with popular culture and local anxieties and brought the painting to the attention of a new, larger audience and museological changes based upon tension and suspicion resulted. Though the theft dismantled many conventions of exclusivity that dictated modes of display and museum visiting at the turn of the century, it also enhanced both the value and vulnerability of the object which overruled democratic notions of access and heralded the introduction of increasingly restrictive viewing conditions. Where once geography in the museum indicated importance, the theft created a rationalisation for additional guards, barriers, and glass enclosures in the early twentieth century. In the wake of the art market boom in the 1960s, this increased to high-tech alarms, water-resistant, concrete reinforced, bulletproof display cases before a culmination in the current display wherein the *Mona Lisa* is entombed behind a fortress-like wall.

While the renovation of the Salle des États increases the security of the *Mona Lisa*, it also reinforces the hierarchical order within the museum that places this painting above the rest. Commercially attractive, the reorganisation of space allows more people to view the Louvre's most popular attraction at the same time. As evidenced by the historic display of the *Mona Lisa*, the extension of space between viewer and object seems to have become synonymous with the concept of increased accessibility. It is therefore important to recognise the paradox between rhetoric and practice: the current display of the *Mona Lisa* creates a new dialogue with space wherein engagement with materiality has been replaced by theatrical viewing experience.

### Chapter 3: Munch Museum, Oslo



‘Not to put too fine a point on it, in theory the museum, thanks to its position, should be able to draw people right off the street into its rooms.’

Johan Langaard, Director of Municipal Art Collections of the City of Oslo, 1966.

The Munch Museum in Oslo epitomises the extraordinary technological innovation in the security of arts collections which has risen to new heights in recent years. A new level of security has been introduced to this space in response to the theft of Edvard Munch’s *The Scream*, 1893 and *Madonna*, 1893-94 on 22 August 2004. This case study articulates how those charged with the responsibility of protecting art objects fear for the safety of their collections and, consequently, base architectural and aesthetic alterations upon this anxiety. The theft triggered a large-scale renovation that placed security above accessibility, permanently and formidably altering the condition of display.

A confrontation between reception and suspicion now permeates the atmosphere at the museum, prompted by the airport-like security screening encountered by visitors upon arrival and departure. Metal detectors and baggage scanners must be passed before a visitor can even purchase a ticket. The barcode on the ticket must be scanned at a second set of locking bulletproof doors which then admit visitors to the gallery. Instead of increasing the accessibility of Oslo's municipal arts collections, the new design goes to great lengths to prioritise the separation of object and viewer. At times, visitors must view paintings from a distance of at least two feet, peering through a glass wall to see an already-glazed painting. Furthermore, some of the changes made in the name of object safety promote hierarchies within the institution by creating spaces where an object's value or importance is reinforced by its display. For instance, select works are placed behind immense floor-to-ceiling glass walls or covered by additional sheets of bulletproof glass whilst neighbouring pictures hang completely unadorned.

### **Methodology and source material**

To examine the way in which the alterations to the Munch Museum place security (or the anxiety of threats to the collection) above accessibility and display, this case study will first develop an informed sense of the building which, as will be shown, reveals a long-standing fear of attack that was inherent to the architecture from its inception in the Cold War Era. By looking back at the first published sources on the building of the Munch Museum in 1964 and 1966 respectively, a sense of the

original condition of display will be established alongside the changes undertaken in the 1994 refurbishment.

As with the Louvre case study, the events of the theft will be detailed in a way that focuses discussion around notions of space instead of the more popular topics, particularly in the media, of perpetrator and motive. By again starting with the empty spaces left behind by *The Scream* and *Madonna*, attention to the alteration of space in the museum following the theft in 2004 will comprise the central discussion of this chapter. Dubbed ‘Fortress Munch’ by the media, the museum closed for ten months to upgrade its security to an unprecedented level, a move that resulted in the sacrifice of significant amounts of display space and negated the ability to engage with the materiality of Munch’s works.<sup>347</sup> The decisions made post-theft will be examined for their implications on the accessibility and display of the collection and how, collectively, the new security measures produce a new museum aesthetic.

### **Anxiety and Architecture: The history of the Munch Museum**

This case study will examine how the post-theft alterations presented a challenge to established viewing conditions at the museum. In contrast to the long-established Louvre, the Munch Museum was built in the 1960s, in the heart of the Cold War Era, and the planning and construction of the museum reveals some of this anxiety. That the theft brought about drastic changes to an already defense-conscious

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<sup>347</sup> Doug Mellgren of the Associated Press is, as far as the author is aware, the first person to use the term ‘Fortress Munch’. See Mellegren, Doug. 17 June 2005. ‘Munch Museum Reopens with Security Upgrade after *Scream* Theft’, *Security Info Watch* [1 July 2006]. [www.securityinfowatch.com/article/printer.jsp?id=4491](http://www.securityinfowatch.com/article/printer.jsp?id=4491).

institution may lend insight as to why the museum adopted one of the world's most sophisticated security systems in a public art collection.

Edvard Munch passed away at Ekely, just outside Oslo, on 23 January 1944. Only after his death was it discovered that he left the entire collection of works remaining in his possession to the City of Oslo. The collection included approximately 1,100 paintings, 18,000 prints, 4,500 watercolours and drawings, six sculptures, ninety-two sketchbooks, and numerous letters and other correspondence. In addition, Munch's sister donated fifteen paintings, a number of drawings, and a large collection of correspondence belonging to Munch and herself. As the bequest represented a comprehensive accumulation of Munch's life work it was decided by city authorities to build a museum dedicated solely to the artist. The Munch Museum, however, did not open until 1963, marking the hundredth anniversary of his birth. The delay was attributed to a stipulation made by the City of Oslo that the museum could only be constructed when building materials, which had been unobtainable in the war years, were in sufficient supply.<sup>348</sup> The intervening period was used by the Director of Municipal Art Collections, art historian Johan Langaard, to plan the building of the museum, which took place between 1960 and 1963.<sup>349</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> Langaard, Johan. 1964. 'The Munch Museum, Oslo', *Museum*, 17: 1, 2.

<sup>349</sup> Langaard was born in Oslo in 1899, and is the author of the main source material on the building of the Munch Museum. Langaard was Secretary, Curator, and then Director at the National Gallery of Oslo, all from 1929 to 1946. In 1946 he was appointed Director of Municipal Art Collections of the City of Oslo, coinciding with the plans for the Munch bequest. Langaard was also responsible for the administration of the Munch Museum, the Vigeland Museum, Aker Collection, Amaldus Nielsen Collection. The two main sources on the building of the Munch Museum are a 1964 article in *Museum* by Johan Langaard and a 1966 book entitled, *The Munch Museum: The Building and Its Collections*, co-written by Langaard who writes a chapter on the building, and Reidar Revold who discusses the collections. Article: Langaard, Johan. 1964. 'The Munch Museum, Oslo', *Museum*, 17: 1. Book: Langaard, Johan and Reidar Revold. 1966. *The Munch Museum: The Building and Its Collections* (Kunsten Idag, Oslo). In an interview in December 2005, Lill Heidi Ophsal, Curator of Education at the Munch Museum stated that she believed that these are also the only two sources published in English. The Munch Museum, as a building, is a very under-documented area. Hindering the

In 1951, a competition was held and only Norwegian architects were invited to submit plans for the new building. Gunnar Fougner and Einar Myklebust won the bid, but it was not until 1960 that site construction began.<sup>350</sup> Post-war material supply and a lack of funding, plus debate over the location of the museum contributed to the delay. The funding issues were eventually resolved with the decision to cover the total building costs (which amounted to 7,700,000 kroner) by the profits made from Oslo's municipally-operated cinemas, however, the debate over site location finds a particular resonance with this project's interest in the security of arts collections.

The Munch Museum was originally planned for the west end of the city, closer to other cultural attractions such as the Vigeland Museum and Frogner Manor, which houses the Oslo City Museum. After deliberation, it was decided to place the museum at Tøyen, in the east end of Oslo. Much time was spent defending the museum's location; the three reasons cited for the decisions included the relative accessibility of Tøyen from all parts of the city, the need for a site large enough to accommodate a building that could display a large amount of works, and the idea that inhabitants in every quarter of town should be entitled to expect their share of museums.<sup>351</sup> Though sound, these reasons do not provide any particular necessity for choosing Tøyen; a good-sized existing site based closer to the city centre might have

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accumulation of information is the decision by Oslo City Council to make blueprints and floor plans of the Munch Museum, and other key buildings (such as City Hall) classified in order to improve security. For more on this decision see, <http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article910847.ece>.

<sup>350</sup> Myklebust also played an important role in the expansion and renovation of the Munch Museum in 1994 for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Munch's death which incorporated the current glass façade, an expansion of display space, and cosmetic changes to the structural (i.e. not partition) walls of the exhibition spaces. The partition walls, as can be seen in images pre-2005, were removed only in the 2004 overhaul.

<sup>351</sup> Langaard, Johan and Reidar Revold. 1966. *The Munch Museum: The Building and Its Collections* (Kunsten Idag, Oslo), 5.



better fit the criteria. For instance, at the time only a bus route existed to transport visitors from the city centre to Tøyen, although the underground link from the city was scheduled to open in 1966. To this day, even with the underground link, Tøyen is still a good distance from the city centre and other popular attractions and therefore somewhat difficult to reach for a tourist. Furthermore, the following comment by Langaard suggests that the remote location of the site was more important than its accessibility. 'In my opinion, the needs of the tourist can be entirely ignored. They will in any case be prepared to go to the particular spot where there is something they would like to see'.<sup>352</sup> This more appropriately indicates that a genuine concern for the protection of the collection (which would be provided by choosing a remote location) is placed ahead of accessibility and convenience; exactly the problem that has manifested itself at the Munch Museum more than forty years later in the post-theft renovation.

The idea that 'inhabitants in every quarter of town should be entitled to expect their share of museums' can also be read as supporting the decision to place the museum in a remote location which was driven by Cold War anxiety. The fear of an aerial attack was a principal factor in the decision to change location to a more remote area that was both outside the city core and removed from other cultural attractions. Langaard states:

This is worth bearing in mind not least in the age of the atom bomb, when it is imperative to disperse our museums instead of concentrating them in one area. In the end it may prove the only way of minimizing the risk of losing priceless cultural treasures in the event of a new war breaking out.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Langaard and Revold 1966, 5.

<sup>353</sup> Langaard and Revold 1966, 5.

A rather ominous tone for the opening page of the first book ever written on the Munch Museum, Langaard was also quick to point out that the museum contains a bomb shelter in the basement.

Admirers of Munch will at the same time be glad to hear that his museum contains an up-to-date shelter in the basement, the first museum in Norway to be thus equipped. The shelter can be reached from the exhibition rooms by means of a lift. Should it ever prove necessary to place the works of art in comparative safety, this can be done in a relatively short time, merely using the lift.<sup>354</sup>

On the basement floor plan of the museum from 1963, the number four indicates the bomb shelter [Fig. 3.1].

That the museum was planned and built with a great deal of attention paid to the protection and defense of its collections suggests a deep-rooted anxiety and protective attitude towards the Munch collection on behalf of the City of Oslo. Furthermore, it foreshadows the concern for the safety of the collection that is expressed in the alterations to the museum in 2004; this anxiety links the original informing principles of the institution and those articulated by the new design.

### **The Original Display of the Collection: Informing Principles**

When it first opened its doors to the public on 29 May 1963, the Munch Museum consisted of a single-storey structure, extending over an area of 2,700 square metres with 1,150 square metres dedicated to exhibition space [Figs. 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4]. One of the decisive factors cited in opting for a single-storey plan was the need to run the museum without undue expense or trouble. As visitors were required to enter and leave by the same door, they could be supervised by a smaller number of

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<sup>354</sup> Langaard and Revold 1966, 6.

attendants.<sup>355</sup> The original design accommodated a ring road and drop-off point for vehicles directly beside the main entrance [Fig. 3.2]. A small car can be seen in Fig. 3.2, parked next to the main entrance. It is slightly difficult to make out, but the denser trees at the far right of the image are on the other side of the main road; the edge of the building is only set back from the main road by thirty metres at most. This proximity to the street was encouraged by Langaard. ‘Not to put too fine a point on it, in theory the museum, thanks to its position, should be able to draw people right off the street into its rooms.’<sup>356</sup> The geographic accessibility intended by this placement would prove unfortunate for the museum. Situating the single-story building with its easily accessible entrance so close to a main road was a major contributing factor in the quick getaway of the thieves during the robbery in 2004. It might have been equipped to withstand a nuclear attack, but it took two armed men only a few short minutes to penetrate the museum and inflict extensive damage.

Due to the volume of works in the Munch bequest, the ability to frequently change the display was imperative. Therefore, easily accessible, well-equipped storage rooms were incorporated into the original design that kept flexibility central to its purpose [Figs. 3.5 & 3.6]. Partition walls were employed to facilitate a continually changing display since they were lightweight, easily manoeuvrable and inexpensive<sup>357</sup> [Figs. 3.7, 3.8 & 3.9]. The partition walls broke up the architecture of open space. Referring to the ground floor plan, numbers nine and ten designate the L-shaped exhibition spaces for paintings and prints respectively [Fig. 3.3]. The

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<sup>355</sup> Langaard 1964, 4.

<sup>356</sup> Langaard and Revold 1966, 8.

<sup>357</sup> These temporary walls survived the museum’s re-design in 1994 but were removed in the 2004 restructuring.

following passage by Langaard illustrates the ideals underlining the design of the museum:

It should be like a Chinese puzzle, gradually unfolding piece by piece, always evoking a sense of expectation and curiosity about the next stage on one's passage through the various rooms. In other words, the building should be designed in such a way that the visitor has no sense of being directed. He should feel that he is moving freely around, that he is on a voyage of discovery of his own. The object, after all, is to arouse so much interest in the exhibits that there is no feeling of obligation at having to move on, but merely a sense of timelessness.<sup>358</sup>

The partitioned walls [for example, see Fig. 3.10] created more intimate spaces for viewing Munch's paintings within the gallery which worked well for his highly personal narratives of life and death, beauty and suffering. While these walls also contributed to an atmosphere in which a viewer would not feel overlooked by others in the gallery, the difficulty of security invigilation posed by these 'blind spots' played a major role in their removal. The walls further posed a risk of accidental damage in that the fragmented, small spaces increased the possibility of visitors colliding with each other or the works on display. It would seem that the original condition of display at the museum was becoming increasingly compromised by public's growing interest in Munch as an artist.

Furthermore, with the pressure to secure and monitor the collection at all times, the walls would have to be removed, directly contradicting one of the original design principles: 'I believe the ideal is the sort of building which would tend to make the visitor forget the architecture entirely, for the simple reason that the items on display are presented so effectively that the visitor willy-nilly concentrates

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<sup>358</sup> Langaard and Revold 1966, 11.

entirely on them'.<sup>359</sup> Langaard's comments suggest that at its inception the architecture of the Munch Museum was perceived as secondary to the collection, something that will be strongly contradicted, if not negated, by the physical changes implemented after the theft.

### **Theft of *The Scream* and *Madonna*: 22 August 2004**

This chapter will now turn to an account of the 2004 theft at the Munch Museum that extracts information from various contemporary sources while seeking to avoid the sensationalism that floods this literature. This material will be used to focus a discussion (in the next section) around what happened to the museum's space after the theft which follows the objective of this thesis. The bulk of the literature on the 2004 theft consists of online news reports. These sources were updated as the story broke and coverage continued throughout the early days after the robbery, the closing of the museum, the widespread criticism of its security which led to the large-scale refurbishment, the recovery of the paintings in 2006 and their immediate display in their damaged state, developments in the prosecution of the criminals, and finally, the reintegration of *The Scream* and *Madonna* into the display at the museum after two years of restoration. The most prolific coverage of the theft was the English version of *Aftenposten*; based in Oslo, it is Norway's largest newspaper. In the early days of the theft, updates appeared hourly.<sup>360</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> Langaard and Revold 1966, 13.

<sup>360</sup> Since November 2008, *Aftenposten* has ceased publishing articles in English in a cost cutting move. The entire English version of the website has been removed. The following article explained the decision; however, it too is no longer accessible. 'So long, farewell...' 5 November 2008.

At 11:00 on the morning of Sunday 22 August 2004, two masked gunmen entered the Munch Museum through the café's open doors. An eyewitness described how she saw a man with a hood over his head run through the gallery threatening visitors with a gun, and ordered them to lie on the floor. Speaking in Norwegian, one of the thieves told visitors to stay calm. The previous witness also saw three museum security guards lying on the floor.<sup>361</sup>

Visitors continued to enter the museum while the robbery took place. A French radio producer who was in the museum at the time of the robbery recalled, 'The paintings were simply attached by wire to the walls. All you had to do is pull on the painting hard for the cord to break loose - which is what I saw one of the thieves doing.'<sup>362</sup> Two American visitors who also witnessed the theft recounted, 'We heard no alarm and it took a terribly long time before the police arrived'.<sup>363</sup> However, it was soon reported by *Aftenposten* that the police had received an alarm signal directly from the museum at 11:10.<sup>364</sup> Jorunn Christoffersen, Director of Communications at the Munch Museum, confirmed shortly after the theft that there had been an alarm system connected to *The Scream*, but it was a silent alarm.<sup>365</sup> The

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*Aftenposten*, <http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article2741143.ece>. Thus, the subsequent links provided for English *Aftenposten* articles are no longer accessible. The Norwegian versions remain.

<sup>361</sup> As reported by eyewitness Markita Ogjová, from the Czech Republic. Fig. 3.13 is a picture of this woman giving her statement to the media. 'The Munch Robbery in Photos'. 22 August 2004, *Aftenposten*. [www.aftenposten.no/english/bildeserier/article854672.ece?start=14](http://www.aftenposten.no/english/bildeserier/article854672.ece?start=14).

<sup>362</sup> Francois Castang, as quoted in 'Scream Stolen from Norway Museum'. 22 August 2004, *BBC News*. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3588282.stm>.

<sup>363</sup> 22 August 2004, *Aftenposten*. [www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article853863.ece](http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article853863.ece).

<sup>364</sup> 22 August 2004. 'Munch Robbery in Photos', *Aftenposten*. [www.aftenposten.no/english/bildeserier/article854672.ece?start=9](http://www.aftenposten.no/english/bildeserier/article854672.ece?start=9).

<sup>365</sup> 22 August 2004. 'Munch Museum management appalled', *Aftenposten*. [www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article854002.ece](http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article854002.ece).

alarm and police response time were ultimately of little significance though, as police estimate that it took the robbers less than a minute to escape with the paintings.<sup>366</sup>

Within minutes of their arrival, police cordoned off the museum and began questioning around seventy staff members and visitors who were in the museum at the time of the robbery [Fig. 3.11 & 3.12]. Problematically, in terms of ‘information control’, witnesses were met by a barrage of journalists seeking interviews once they emerged from the museum. These accounts contributed to the prolific reporting of the theft and images of anxious and frightened witnesses bolstered the shocking headlines [Fig. 3.13]. As will be detailed shortly, these reports would soon shift focus to the security of the museum.

Just a few hours after the theft, *Aftenposten* released a diagram of the route the thieves took through the museum<sup>367</sup> [Fig. 3.14]. A testament to how quickly information was collected from witnesses and museum staff by police and passed onto the media, this diagram represented a simplistic, yet entirely accurate map of the theft. In fact, this image is currently the closest thing to a recent floor plan that is available to the public since the previously mentioned recall of all museum floor plans and blueprints.

The diagram traces the steps of the thieves from their entry through the café’s open doors, into the entrance hall, then a right hand turn into the exhibition space where one man held staff and visitors at gunpoint while another ran to the partition

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<sup>366</sup> 22 August 2004. ‘Lack of security shocks police’, *Aftenposten*. [www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article854430.ece](http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article854430.ece).

<sup>367</sup> The diagram was reprinted by *BBC News* almost immediately. See ‘*Scream* Stolen from Norway Museum’. 22 August 2004, *BBC News*. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3588282.stm>.

wall where *The Scream* hung; *Madonna* hung to its right, on a perpendicular solid wall [Fig. 3.15]. Once both paintings had been torn from the walls, the thieves retraced their steps back to the entrance hall but exited the building through the main entrance instead of the café. As mentioned, the museum's original plan intended for the main entrance to filter visitors in and out of a single entry and exit point. It was the remodelling in 1994 that created another entrance from the café. Exiting via the main entrance ensured the thieves had a shorter distance to the getaway car parked nearby [Fig. 3.16].

A third accomplice was waiting in a black Audi A6 station wagon, with its engine running, on the street that ran alongside the main entrance. Photographs were taken by an anonymous witness [Figs. 3.17 and 3.18]. The car was found later that day, abandoned; its interior sprayed clean with a fire extinguisher near a local tennis club [Fig. 3.19]. The discovery of the car did not provide police with any additional clues as to the identities of the thieves.

At 15:00 on the day of the theft, police revealed that witnesses had found parts of broken picture frames along a street in central Oslo. These were later confirmed to be from the frames of *The Scream* and *Madonna*. These images, [Figs. 3.20 and 3.21], were released to the public along with the following statement from Christoffersen: '*The Scream* (Skrik) is painted on board and not on canvas. As long as the painting is framed and in glass it is safe. But without a frame we are terrified for what may happen'.<sup>368</sup> Watching from her own car later that afternoon, a witness

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<sup>368</sup> 22 August 2004. 'Fear for Scream's safety', *Aftenposten*.  
[www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article854033.ece](http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article854033.ece).



saw the getaway vehicle pulled off to the side of a road. She recalled, 'I saw the robbers kick, wrench and hit the paintings in order to loosen them from the frame. They didn't treat the paintings well and unfortunately I believe the odds are high that the pictures were damaged or destroyed'.<sup>369</sup> The witness also explained that she watched two men calmly smash the protective glass on the paintings before they were loaded back into the car.<sup>370</sup> The thieves probably removed the frames fearing that they contained tracking devices, but the brutality evidenced by the photos of the battered frames and glass, combined with a previously released account of how the man escaping with the *Madonna* dropped the painting on his way to the car, added to the anxiety over the safety of the paintings. These stories enhanced the vulnerability of the paintings when outside of the museum setting. It was at this point, where the initial shock of the theft was settling and the anxiety over the safety of the paintings was increasing, that attention turned to the security at the Munch Museum.

Headlines quickly shifted from 'Fear for *Scream*'s safety' to 'Lack of security shocks police', 'Munch Museum security a shambles' and 'Almost as easy as robbing a kiosk'.<sup>371</sup> Just three days after the theft, *Aftenposten* published an article providing evidence that the Munch Museum was granted funds for new video surveillance equipment eight months before the theft, in January 2004, but nothing had been done about it. A decision to professionalise the guards at the museum,

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<sup>369</sup> 25 August 2004. 'Munch Museum security a shambles', *Aftenposten*. [www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article856344.ece](http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article856344.ece).

<sup>370</sup> 25 August 2004, 'Munch Museum security a shambles', *Aftenposten*. [www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article856344.ece](http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article856344.ece).

<sup>371</sup> *Aftenposten* headlines from 22-25 August 2004. Numerous other international news agencies published similar reports including the BBC (UK), CBC (Canada), CNN (USA).

rather than use volunteer guides and guards, had also not been fully implemented.<sup>372</sup>

These admissions provided fuel for attaching blame for the theft to the institution.

Instead of denying responsibility however, Lise Mjøs, Director of the City of Oslo's art collections at the time and now Director of the Munch Museum, admitted that the museum's security was inadequate. She relayed to the public that a technical expert hired by Norwegian Broadcasting (NRK) examined the museum's security equipment and found that not only was the equipment outdated, the camera filming the entrance was disconnected and most of the other cameras were mounted so poorly that they did not pick up relevant images.<sup>373</sup> This might explain why surveillance footage of the thieves has never been released to the public for identification purposes. Furthermore, it had also been discovered that most of the cameras that were properly mounted were simply too dirty to convey any useful images.<sup>374</sup> Thus, the criticism of the state of security at the museum during the time of the theft was warranted and the museum seemed to acknowledge this. As calls for security upgrades were inevitable, perhaps the disappointment and regret felt by the museum led it to be increasingly accommodating when the time came to implement a new security structure.

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<sup>372</sup> 25 August 2004. 'Munch Museum security a shambles', *Aftenposten*.  
[www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article856344.ece](http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article856344.ece).

<sup>373</sup> 25 August 2004. 'Munch Museum security a shambles', *Aftenposten*.  
[www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article856344.ece](http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article856344.ece).

<sup>374</sup> Interview with anonymous security guard, Munch Museum, Oslo, 15 December 2005.

### **Fortress Munch: Security Upgrade 2004 – 2005**

The objective here is to develop an understanding of how the accessibility and display of the collection were altered as a result of the changes brought about following the theft. The following analysis draws on information and data gathered during visits to the museum in December 2005 to see the new security upgrade and September 2006, to see the newly recovered paintings that were placed on display in their damaged state for five days before they underwent a two-year conservation and restoration process.

#### **I. Accessibility**

As previously stated, when the Munch Museum reopened ten months after the theft of *The Scream* and *Madonna*, it was quickly dubbed ‘Fortress Munch’ by the Norwegian media.<sup>375</sup> It was an interesting choice of label by the same groups who had harshly criticized the museum’s lack of security at the time of the theft. Without alteration to the exterior of the building since the 1994 remodelling [Fig. 3.22], little evidence suggests the almost 40 million krone (£4.3 million) that was invested in the new security measures at first glance. This quickly changes upon entering the front doors. The main entrance now contains two sets of automatic remote-locking, bullet-proof sliding glass doors. Once through these, one is met by a

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<sup>375</sup> First mention of the term is found in Mellegren, Doug. 17 June 2005. ‘Munch Museum Reopens with Security Upgrade after *Scream* Theft’, *Security Info Watch* [1 July 2006]. [www.securityinfowatch.com/article/printer.jsp?id=4491](http://www.securityinfowatch.com/article/printer.jsp?id=4491).

team of security guards operating a metal detector and a baggage scanner<sup>376</sup> [Figs. 3.23 & 3.24]. As the images show, this equipment is similar to those found in any airport. Coats and bags must be removed and checked in a coin-operated locker downstairs and any items not checked in a locker – such as mobile phones, car keys and anything with a high density of metal – must be scanned just as in an airport. The only place to go without passing through security is downstairs to the lockers. Thus, the security checkpoint is situated so that even visitors to the café or gift shop are subjected to the metal detector and baggage scanner.

The ticket kiosk is set in the main entrance between the security checkpoint and the entry to the gallery. Even the tickets have high-spec security. Each ticket has a barcode that when scanned unlocks the next set of glass doors leading into the main gallery [Fig. 3.25]. The ticket is in fact a sticker, meant to be worn while in the gallery leaving a strangely restrictive impression of ‘bar-coded’ visitors wandering through this high-security space.

The bar-coded tickets open an extensive set of remote-locking security doors that lead into the exhibition space [Fig. 3.26]. On the gallery side of these doors is a further set of waist-level, locking metal swing gates [Fig. 3.27]. Figs. 3.24 and 3.27 depict the Director of the Munch Museum at the time of the theft, Gunnar Sorensen, in various poses inspecting the new security measures in what was likely a public relations move to align the management of the museum with this new and

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<sup>376</sup> During a visit in December 2005 I was asked to check my small handbag downstairs in a locker. Jackets, scarves and gloves all had to be removed. I was allowed to bring paper and a pencil into the gallery but these, along with a silver bracelet had to be removed and placed in a tray for x-ray scanning. After passing through the metal detector, I collected my bracelet, pencil and paper, and was met in front of the shop by the Curator of Education for my meeting and ‘tour’ of the new building. All staff and visitors are subject to security, no exceptions.

impenetrable security arrangement.<sup>377</sup> The three sets of sophisticated remote-locking bullet-proof doors at the main entrance, and at the entry and exit to the exhibition rooms work on the premise of deterrence (the visible security puts off any would-be criminals), prevention (of entry or exit with an object) and delay (impede a quick escape, allowing police apprehension).

Ideally criminals would be deterred or detected at the first security checkpoint. If a criminal penetrated the first checkpoint, the purpose of the second set of remote-locking doors is to prevent entry to the exhibition space. The possibility exists for a criminal to be trapped between the set of double doors which, being bullet-proof, in theory is a safe precaution but the likelihood of this happening would seem significantly low. It follows that if this second set of doors was penetrated, the third set at the exit would deny escape. If the doors served their purpose, a criminal could then be contained somewhere inside the building. This in itself is problematic as the museum runs the risk of trapping visitors or staff inside the same space as the armed assailant. Thus, the ‘Achilles heel’ of museum security is armed robbery. No museum can place the safety of the public and their staff above an object, but at the same time, the security at the entrance to the Munch Museum reveals a concerted effort to deter and prevent a reoccurrence of the 2004 theft.

One of the consequences of these protective doors is a rather loud ‘shooshing’ noise which is followed by the ‘clanging’ of the metal gates when they

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<sup>377</sup> Following the theft, Gunnar Sorensen took a leave of absence due to stress and was permanently replaced by Lise Mjøs, who at the time was Director of the City of Oslo Municipal Art Collections. The forlorn pair can be seen standing together in front of the empty space where *The Scream* had hung [Fig. 3.28].

close.<sup>378</sup> The noise permeates the interior museum space; there is a point in the middle of the exhibition space where the noise of the entry apparatus mingles with that made by the exit. The audible intrusion serves as a subtle reminder that security infuses the museum experience.

Another implication of the security measures at the entrance of the museum is the significant delays caused for visitors, even on less busy days. For instance, it now takes more than twenty minutes longer to get school groups into the museum.<sup>379</sup> This delay easily translates into a loss of time spent in the museum or workshops. In an hour-long tour, a third of that time is taken up by simply trying to get inside the museum if organisers have not, or cannot plan around the additional time required.

The extent to which security impedes access to the museum is further illustrated by the following example. On 17 June 2005, the grand re-opening ceremony was delayed by almost an hour due to the congestion created by the security procedures in operation at the entrance to the museum. Invited guests and the press waited in long queues to pass through security. Security checks took so long at the ceremony that organisers eventually gave up and simply ushered the 600 guests through.<sup>380</sup> In what must have been a deeply embarrassing moment for the museum, the long-awaited security upgrades were proven completely redundant when they had to be overridden. The central purpose of the opening which was to showcase the new and improved security of the Munch Museum and send a message

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<sup>378</sup> Frequently I saw other visitors glance or spin around each time the distracting doors and gates opened and closed during a visit in December 2005.

<sup>379</sup> Interview with Lill Heidi Ophsal, Curator of Education, Munch Museum, 15 December 2005.

<sup>380</sup> 'Scream Theft Museum Reopens Doors'. 18 June 2005, *BBC News*.  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/arts/4098568.stm>.

to the public that ‘we’ve got it right this time’ was a total failure. The debacle highlighted that museum security is only as effective as those implementing it. Even the most sophisticated security is pointless if it cannot be properly used; impeding public access to a municipal art collection seems to run in strong contradiction to what the museum was hoping to achieve.

## **II. Display**

The removal of the partition walls, replacing the carpet with parquet flooring and white-washing the walls has created a noticeable ‘cleaner’ or more open display space inside the museum [Figs. 3.29 and 3.30]. At the junction where the two largest exhibition halls meet, a labyrinth-like floor plan was designed to prevent or delay a quick get-away for thieves. By dimming the lighting and hanging prints and drawings along the winding corridors, this purpose is cleverly disguised. Instead of using partition walls to break up the space, dropped-height structural walls have been built. Desirable in terms of security, the new floor plan dictates a single-direction path for visitors to take through the museum while the removal of the partition walls reduces the ‘blind spots’ that impeded a warder’s view of the exhibition space. This new condition of display is rather far removed from the informing principles of the museum as stated by Langaard earlier in the chapter.<sup>381</sup>

Consequently, the removal of the partition walls has meant a significant loss of the display space that they previously provided. In fact, the restructuring

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<sup>381</sup> Langaard wanted the building to gradually unfold like a Chinese puzzle, not being able to see what is around the next corner and with the visitor having no sense of being directed. Langaard and Revold 1966, 11.

necessitated the sacrifice of forty percent of the museum's entire display space.<sup>382</sup>

Recalling the size and breadth of the permanent collection left by Munch to the City of Oslo in his will, this is a drastic loss, particularly since the museum was built with the aim of trying to show as much of the collection as possible to the public at one time.

Perhaps the most extreme measure to affect the display of objects in the new design is the presence of three, large floor to ceiling glass walls that separate a viewer from paintings on the wall by approximately two feet [Figs. 3.31 and 3.32]. When the Munch Museum reopened to the public on 18 June 2005 with the *Munch by Himself* exhibition, these glass walls presented a formidable barrier between the visitor and object.<sup>383</sup> Without exception, all of the paintings and drawings that were set behind these walls were already glazed. This meant that viewers had to stand two feet away from a painting and look through two layers of glass. Recalling again the stated objectives of the original design of the building according to Langaard, 'I believe the ideal is the sort of building which would tend to make the visitor forget the architecture entirely, for the simple reason that the items on display are presented so effectively that the visitor willy-nilly concentrates entirely on them'.<sup>384</sup>

This new viewing condition seriously complicates any attempt to engage with the materiality of a work of art. It is nearly impossible to detect the material aspects of a painting under these conditions. Jan Birkehorn, head of security at the National

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<sup>382</sup> Interview with Lill Heidi Ophsal, Curator of Education, Munch Museum, 15 December 2005.

<sup>383</sup> *Munch By Himself* opened at the Stockholm Moderna Museet 19 February to 15 May 2005, then from 18 June 2005 to 28 August 2005 at the Munch Museum, Oslo and travelled onto the Royal Academy in London from 10 October to 11 December 2005.

<sup>384</sup> Langaard and Revold 1966, 13.



Museum in Sweden said on the day after the theft that it was almost impossible to make paintings theft-proof without ruining the experience for visitors. He said, 'Should you put them inside security monitors with thick glass? I think the experience of looking at them would be lost'.<sup>385</sup>

Munch's work is full of roughly textured surfaces created by erratic and energetic brushstrokes that were complemented by the weathering effects of an outdoor studio and storage area that he subjected his works to. When one must stand that far away from the work, without the ability to shift around to make the most out of a vantage point, the positions of object and viewer become fixed and static. The dichotomy between the two distinct sides of the glass barrier leaves little room for interaction. The 'absolute' safety implied by the wall of bullet-proof glass guarantees an impenetrable space around the objects it contains. The removal of objects from the space previously shared with the viewer suggests that they have a value to the institution that outweighs the risks posed by being in close proximity to the public.

The Munch Museum intends to have all of the paintings in their collection glazed, a costly, yet sound precaution, especially for objects that travel.<sup>386</sup> In the meantime, unglazed objects are placed behind large sheets of bullet-proof glass. Paintings that are vulnerable (i.e. easily portable) due to their small size, whether glazed or not, are also placed behind these sheets of glass [Fig. 3.33]. Throughout the gallery, paintings with protective glass are interspersed between unprotected paintings, prompting a marked visual disruption within an exhibition. An awareness

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<sup>385</sup> 23 August 2004. 'Munch art theft stirs debate on museum security', *USA Today*.  
[https://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2004-08-23-scream-norway\\_x.htm](https://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2004-08-23-scream-norway_x.htm).

<sup>386</sup> Interview with Lill Heidi Ophsal, Curator of Education, Munch Museum, 15 December 2005.

of the ease with which value judgements, such as those implied by selective security, ever so subtly operate within a condition of display should be given consideration in light of the proliferation of these kinds of measures.

For instance, following the theft at the Munch Museum, the National Gallery, Oslo made changes to the display of their important Munch works. On 12 February 1994, which was the morning of the opening ceremonies of the Olympics in Lillehammer (where police attention was diverted), the National Gallery's version of *The Scream*, 1893, was stolen.<sup>387</sup> Interestingly, following the recovery of the painting three months later little alteration to its display occurred apart from ensuring it hung on the first floor of the museum (when stolen *The Scream* had been temporarily installed in a ground floor exhibition) and far removed from any windows [Fig. 3.34]. It was only in October 2005, after the reopening of the Munch Museum with its new security upgrade, that protective glass sheets were installed over the National Gallery's already-glazed *The Scream* and *Madonna* [Figs. 3.35 and 3.36]. One other picture, Vincent van Gogh's *Self-portrait*, 1889, which hung in the same room, is also placed behind glass due to its very small size. A year later, the 'Munch Room' at the National Gallery had been reinstalled, meaning that *The Scream* and *Madonna* were once again placed in a room with only other works by Munch. The small Van

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<sup>387</sup> It took two men just 50 seconds to use a ladder to smash through a ground floor window and steal *The Scream* which hung next to the window. A security guard ignored the alarm that was triggered. The thieves left a note saying 'Thanks for the poor security'. The painting was recovered, undamaged, three months later. Paal Enger, a former footballer, and Willian Asheim were convicted of the theft in 1996. For more on this theft, see Dolnick, Edward. 2005. *The Rescue Artist: A True Story of Art, Thieves and the Hunt for a Missing Masterpiece* (Harper Collins, London) as well as the Metropolitan Police's response to a Freedom of Information Request pertaining to the involvement of the Met Police in the recovery of *The Scream* in 1994: Directorate of Information, Directorate of Public Affairs and Specialist Crime Directorate. 8 September 2011. 'Metropolitan Police Response to a Freedom of Information Request', [http://www.met.police.uk/foi/pdfs/disclosure\\_2011/september/2011080000560.pdf](http://www.met.police.uk/foi/pdfs/disclosure_2011/september/2011080000560.pdf)

Gogh self-portrait had been placed in storage.<sup>388</sup> Apart from *The Scream* and *Madonna*, no other paintings in the entire collection are placed behind glass which reinforces the value placed upon them by the institution, and the anxiety it feels over the risk presented by their public display.

Furthermore, the floor-to-ceiling glass walls incorporated into the new display at the Munch Museum may point to an emerging security aesthetic. The Munch Museum is not the only institution to use these features and nor was it the first, but when compared to two other leading examples, it becomes clear that in each case the function of the feature confidently places the security of a collection above its accessibility. In a perfect conflation of airport and museum security, the Rijksmuseum at Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam consists of a suspended rectangular exhibition space with large, shuttered glass windows on each end [Fig. 3.37]. Accessed via a staircase that leads directly from the museum shop below into the exhibition space, floor-to ceiling glass walls run along each side of the space [Fig. 3.38]. Dutch architects Benthem Crouwel NACO designed the museum in 2001; construction began the following year and was completed in 2003.<sup>389</sup> According to their website, the design of the suspended gold-coloured space was based upon the results of an extensive study by the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage (ICN) concerning the possible effects of vibration, climate conditions, and security aspects.<sup>390</sup> The design of the space and the linear glass walls evoke the transitory nature of the airport and this is superimposed upon the viewing experience. By

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<sup>388</sup> Interview with anonymous security guard, National Gallery, Oslo, 1 October 2006.

<sup>389</sup> Benthem Crouwel also developed the masterplan for Schiphol Airport, scheduled for completion in 2020.

<sup>390</sup> Benthem Crouwel Architects, 'Rijksmuseum Amsterdam Schiphol 2001-2003', company website. [http://www.benthemcrouwel.nl/portal\\_presentation/museums/rijksmuseum](http://www.benthemcrouwel.nl/portal_presentation/museums/rijksmuseum).

placing objects behind this flat surface the viewer is prompted to ‘move along’ in the same manner as the rest of their journey through the airport, contradicting the idea of the museum as a ‘suspension’ of (waiting) time.

The second example was the result of the theft of five eighteenth-century ivory statues by Huguenot sculptor David le Marchand from the Art Gallery of Ontario [AGO] in Toronto in January 2004. The ivories were on loan from media magnate Ken Thomson at the time. Thieves walked into the gallery during opening hours and prised open a wooden display cabinet. CCTV footage recorded the incident and was used in the recovery. A \$150,000 CAD (£94,000) reward was offered by the insurance company and two weeks later, a lawyer acting as a go-between returned the ivories. The resulting reintegration of the ivories into the display at the AGO, which reopened after Frank Gehry’s remodeling in 2008, saw them placed behind floor-to-ceiling glass walls [Fig. 3.39]. Director of Security Mike Ferguson admitted that the displays present a great curatorial challenge.<sup>391</sup> However, the theft of the ivories highlighted the vulnerability of the collection which saw the introduction of the glass walls that, as evidenced by their use at the AGO, Rijksmuseum Schiphol and Munch Museum seem to present the best option for object security.

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<sup>391</sup> Ferguson is the Director of Protection Services at the AGO and was the security consultant for the AGO’s Transformation project (the Gehry-designed expansion which opened in 2008). The above statement was made during a conference paper. Ferguson, Mike. 1 November 2005. ‘Portrait of an Art Theft: A Case Study: The Art Gallery of Ontario Experience’ *Rogues Gallery: An Investigation Into Art Theft, The Third Annual AXA Art Conference*, British Museum, London.

### **Recovery of *The Scream* and *Madonna*: 31 August 2006**

On 31 August 2006, *The Scream* and *Madonna* were recovered in a police sting operation. To this day, the Norwegian police have not confirmed how they came to know the location of the paintings which has fuelled much speculation in the press.<sup>392</sup> In particular, the recovery occurred at exactly the same time that David Toska, the man convicted of masterminding Norway's NOKAS robbery, was trying to negotiate a deal on his sentence.<sup>393</sup> Just ten days before the recovery, it was reported in the news that Toska was bargaining for reduced jail time by offering to help retrieve the Munch paintings.<sup>394</sup>

The NOKAS robbery is considered Norway's largest and most brutal robbery. Armed men raided the Norwegian Cash Service (NOKAS) headquarters in Stavanger on 5 April 2004 which resulted in the killing of a police officer. An exceptionally violent crime by Norwegian standards, Toska was arrested in Malaga on 5 April 2005 on the first anniversary of the theft. It has been suggested by Iver Stensrud, the head of Oslo Police's Organised Crime division, that the theft of *The Scream* and *Madonna* on 22 August 2004 may have been an attempt to divert police attention away from the hunt for those involved in the NOKAS robbery as many suspects, including Toska, were still on the run at the time. The Munch robbery put a

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<sup>392</sup> The Norwegian police have acknowledged this but say there are too many loose ends in the case to reveal more information. See 4 September 2006. 'NOKAS appeals trial underway', *Aftenposten*. [www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article1445035.ece](http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article1445035.ece).

<sup>393</sup> 8 April 2005. 'Munch robbery a diversion?' *Aftenposten*. [www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article1011962.ece](http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article1011962.ece).

<sup>394</sup> 21 August 2006. 'Toska seeks deal on stolen Munch masterpieces', *Aftenposten*. [www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article1429384.ece](http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article1429384.ece).

huge strain on police resources when it occurred just four months after the NOKAS robbery and required a grant of additional funding from the state.<sup>395</sup>

Furthermore, just three months before the recovery three men were found guilty of charges relating to the theft of the paintings while three others were acquitted.<sup>396</sup> The activity of the trials most certainly created an environment that provided dialogue between the accused, law enforcement and the judicial system in the way that only last minute bargaining and negotiating can. Even though the extent of that information is limited, the timings of both the NOKAS and Munch Museum robbery trials likely contributed in some measure to the recovery of the paintings. Unfortunately, apart from the fact that the paintings never left Norway and were found on a farm just outside Oslo, little is known about the conditions in which the paintings were kept.

The Munch Museum issued a press release on 1 September 2006 hailing the recovery as a ‘major and joyful occasion for the Munch Museum’. The press release stated that it was ‘highly likely’ that the original paintings had been found but that one hundred percent verification would only come once curators had carried out a

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<sup>395</sup> 4 September 2006. ‘NOKAS appeals trial underway’, *Aftenposten*.

[www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article1445035.ece](http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article1445035.ece).

<sup>396</sup> The three convicted suspects included Stian Skjold, 30, one of the armed robbers who was initially acquitted was sentenced to five-and-a-half years on appeal; Petter Tharaldsen, 34, the getaway driver who received the longest sentence of nine-and-a-half years (this included a further charge for an unrelated robbery) and Bjorn Hoen, 37, who was charged with planning the theft and received nine years. The three acquitted included the two presumed accomplices Petter Rosenvinge, 38, and Morten Hugo Johansen, 39; and Thomas Nataas, 35, a famous rally car driver who was accused of handling stolen goods. He owned a bus where the two paintings were allegedly hidden for a month after the robbery but claimed he only allowed their storage as he feared for his life if he did not comply. Of the three men pictured in Fig. 3.16, Skjold is the robber in the black hooded sweatshirt, Rosenvinge is the robber in the white hooded sweatshirt and Tharaldsen is the driver. Police say Rosenvinge died of a heroin overdose in 2006. See 23 April 2007. ‘Munch art thieves jailed in Oslo’, *BBC News*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6583857.stm>.

more thorough examination of the works, including an assessment of any damage. The museum reiterated their wish to have the paintings back on public display at the earliest possible opportunity.<sup>397</sup> In an otherwise straightforward press release, one sentence is rather revealing with respect to the museum's position on the future security of the paintings: 'The works have now been handed back to the Munch Museum and are currently in the Museum's vault'.<sup>398</sup> The reference to the vault reconstructs the image of the museum as a fortress, something that will be important as the museum needed to promote a strong image with respect to the ability to look after the paintings.

The condition of the paintings upon their recovery, however, indicated that they had not been well looked-after [Figs. 3.40 to 3.42]. *The Scream*, which is painted on delicate cardboard, sustained significant water damage to the lower left quadrant of the painting as well as impact damage to a corner caused by either banging or dropping the object. The *Madonna* suffered a broken canvas stretcher, scratching and paint loss to its surface as well as two punctures, one of which measured one inch in diameter (2.5 centimetres). The damage sustained by the paintings was a physical manifestation of brutality of art theft; that the paintings held such an important place in Norwegian culture (and the more global significance of Munch's contribution to Expressionism) only increased the public's interest in their recovery and condition.

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<sup>397</sup> 'Press release 01.09.2006: The stolen Munch works *The Scream* and *Madonna* have been recovered',

<sup>398</sup> 'Press release 01.09.2006: The stolen Munch works *The Scream* and *Madonna* have been recovered',

In response to the attention surrounding the recovery of the paintings, on 12 September 2006 the museum and the City of Oslo released a joint statement announcing that the damaged paintings would go on public display before they underwent restoration. ‘The enormous interest...and the fact that it will take time before we can again exhibit them after repairs...prompted the museum to show them to the public and the media’.<sup>399</sup> In a perceptive move that flaunted both the return long-awaited paintings as well as the newly renovated high-security Munch Museum, *The Scream* and *Madonna* were placed on display to the public for five days from 27 September to 1 October 2006.

The exhibition of the recovered paintings had a ceremonial tone. The paintings were displayed so that they were lying flat, in purpose-built acclimatised glass showcases [Figs. 3.43 to 3.45]. As if lying-in-state, the pictures were roped off and placed in the centre of the room that best-highlighted the interior security of the museum. On either side of the room were two of the new floor-to-ceiling glass wall display cases.<sup>400</sup> Visitors could circumnavigate the central display while lining the walls were works that had special reference to *The Scream* and *Madonna* – other paintings from the *Frieze of Life* series, lithographs and a number of drawings. In addition, relevant material (including that pertaining to the theft itself) such as notes and documentary photographs were displayed outside the room that contained the recovered paintings.

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<sup>399</sup> 12 September 2006. ‘Museum to exhibit damaged Munch paintings’, *Aftenposten*. [www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article1455033.ece](http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article1455033.ece).

<sup>400</sup> Interestingly though, the glass walls were retracted for this exhibition and thus not in use.



For security reasons, and to reduce overcrowding, visitors were admitted to the room in groups of twenty, on a one-in, one-out basis. For the duration of the exhibition, a long queue stretched across the grounds outside the museum [Fig. 3.46]. Over the course of the five days, 5,508 people attended the exhibition. On the last day alone, 1,405 people visited the museum. Putting it in perspective, this was 100 more visitors than in the entire month of September the previous year (2005).<sup>401</sup> In much the same way as at the Louvre upon the recovery of the *Mona Lisa* in 1913 (and for that matter, the display of the empty space in 1911) art theft once again produced an increase in attendance figures.

Nevertheless, whilst public curiosity and interest in the return of the paintings proved great, critical reception to the exhibition was mixed. In an interview with *Aftenposten* concerning the display of the paintings in their damaged state, Munch historian Hans Richard Elgheim claimed, 'I think it's unnecessary that the paintings be reduced to monuments over criminal activity. I can understand the public's curiosity, but the Munch Museum is an art museum, not a crime museum'.<sup>402</sup> This comment points directly at some of the complex issues facing the museum following the return of the paintings. For instance, the museum could benefit greatly from an increased profile and ticket sales by the exhibition of the paintings in their damaged state. It was guaranteed to bring new audiences to the museum; the exhibition provided an alternative narrative that could engage those who were interested more in the story of the theft than in Munch's artwork. This narrative was indeed that of

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<sup>401</sup> Munch Museum, Oslo. Press Release dated 2 October 2006.

<http://www.munch.museum.no/content.aspx?id=6>.

<sup>402</sup> 4 September 2006. 'Recovered Munch paintings may be displayed 'as is'', *Aftenposten*. [www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article1445071.ece](http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article1445071.ece).

the ‘crime museum’ disparaged by Elgheim and there was no way to avoid it.

Regardless of how they were put back on display, the attention the theft received in the press would ensure that the paintings would be inextricably linked to this history. By taking ownership of the first public display of the paintings, the Munch Museum was able to exact some measure of control over the situation.

The visual evidence of damage on the paintings evoked a sense of pathos and highlighted their vulnerability. Set within the newly renovated museum that had undergone a drastic transformation to prevent a reoccurrence of the cause of the current state of the paintings, the museum was also able to showcase its ability to provide a secure future for the Munch collection. The five-day exhibition resourcefully enabled the museum to introduce visitors to its high-tech security apparatus by way of an event that rationalised a need for such measures. The visible damage to the paintings was probably the best justification the museum had for its new reputation as ‘Fortress Munch’.

Immediately following the exhibition in their damaged state, the paintings underwent an extensive two-year conservation.<sup>403</sup> *The Scream* and *Madonna* were placed back on display in the museum on 23 May 2008 in the exhibition ‘*Scream and Madonna – Revisited*’ which ran until 26 September 2008. The exhibition contained documentation and photographs relating to the conservation of the paintings. Whilst

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<sup>403</sup> Idemitsu Petroleum Norge AS, the company that donated \$10 million to the restoration of the Munch Museum in 1994 (on the condition that Mr. Sazo Idemitsu, a keen collector, could borrow three Munch paintings every year for fifteen years) contributed ‘a significant amount of funding’ to support the conservation and research surrounding the newly recovered paintings. See Munch Museum, Oslo, Press Release dated 2 October 2006. <http://www.munch.museum.no/content.aspx?id=6>, as well as ‘Edvard Munch and Idemitsu’, in ‘Welcome to Idemitsu Petroleum Norge AS’, Idemitsu Petroleum Norge AS company website, <http://www.idemitsu.no/default.asp?type=archive>. Last accessed 8.3.2006.

the *Madonna*, owing to its canvas support bears little trace of the injury it sustained, *The Scream* presents more obvious damage [Fig. 3.47]. Dented corners and a large water stain that was irreparable without causing further paint loss to its cardboard support are now prominent features of the work.

Tucked safely behind the bulletproof glass walls of the Munch Museum, *The Scream* and *Madonna* are once again reincorporated into the display. The distance from which viewers can enjoy the paintings however, is a direct result of the decisions and compromises made in reaction to the theft. As Director Lise Mjø̂s stated the day after the theft, ‘If we only thought about security, then we would have to place the pictures in a vault, but then they aren’t accessible’.<sup>404</sup> The compromise, it would seem, was to make that vault look as accessible as possible [Fig. 3.48].

## **Conclusion**

This case study illustrates the very real problems museums face as a result of theft. As the Munch Museum stated on the day of the theft, ‘This is terrible, but an armed robbery is hard to defend against. We have to make allowances for the safety of both the public and the guards. During an armed robbery one is a bit helpless’.<sup>405</sup> As evidenced above, the changes made to the Munch Museum following the theft were largely based around the idea of avoiding, as best as possible, another armed robbery. Preventing, deterring, or at the very least, delaying a thief from gaining

<sup>404</sup> ‘Munch art theft stirs debate on museum security’. 23 August 2004, *USA Today*. [https://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2004-08-23-scream-norway\\_x.htm](https://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2004-08-23-scream-norway_x.htm).

<sup>405</sup> Statement made by Jorunn Christoffersen, Director of Communications, Munch Museum, as quoted in ‘Munch Museum Management Appalled’. 22 August 2004, *Aftenposten*. [www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article854002.ece](http://www.aftenposten.no/english/local/article854002.ece).

access to an object and escaping with it were primary considerations within the new design.

In this respect, baggage scanners, metal detectors, remote-locking gates and security doors, one-way entry and exit points and objects encased in bulletproof glass are entirely logical components for the museum. However, these measures, most commonly associated with public spaces such as airports, run in contrast to traditional expectations of a museum setting. Together these components form a new aesthetic that places security above accessibility; this altered condition of display often results in the sacrifice of traditional museological considerations. The case study of the Munch Museum shows how this prioritisation meant the loss of forty percent of its display space, a notable separation between object and viewer which translated into the inability to engage with the materiality of an object, a physically intrusive and visually disruptive museum experience, as well as a selective display of object security that suggests institutional hierarchies and value judgements.

Whilst public pressure on the museum to upgrade its security was formidable and probably influenced the final product, the extent to which it went could be considered excessive. The technical difficulties encountered during the reopening of the new design and the subsequent exhibitions where many of the costly new measures were made redundant when they had to be overridden by staff for causing undue delays. Perhaps a compromise between accessibility and display can be found in a design that strongly integrates security into the entry and exit points of a building, which would go a long way to address the chief concerns of most

institutions which are armed robbery or vandalism, but also where more careful thought is given to obtrusive and overt object security inside.

The visual inequality expressed by selective pockets of high security within a display space directly challenges the idea of institutional transparency that most museums profess. Though it must be balanced against cost considerations, a higher priority placed upon the more equitable treatment of objects would significantly reduce the problematic hierarchies and judgments that are implied by overt security measures. In the current fear-filled and risk-adverse global climate, the problem is not the presence of the high levels of security in museums (high-value objects require security) but the way in which, in the absence of dialogue between the fields of security and museology, their implementation can construct meaning and value, dictate modes of display, interrupt viewing experiences and most importantly, erect intimidating physical barriers between viewer and object.

## Chapter 4: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston



‘How do we get past this being our main story?’

Anne Hawley, Director of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 25 August 2006.

On 18 March 1990, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston became the target of the world’s largest and most expensive art theft in history.<sup>406</sup> During the early hours of the morning following St. Patrick’s Day, thieves disguised as police officers stole thirteen works of art with an estimated value of \$500 million (£350 million) from Isabella Stewart Gardner’s collection. The stolen works include Johannes Vermeer’s *The Concert*, 1658-1660, Rembrandt van Rijn’s *A Lady and*

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<sup>406</sup> The Gardner theft is the single largest property theft in recorded history. See ‘Twenty-first Year Since the Theft of Thirteen Priceless Artworks from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston’, Press release dated 10 March 2011, *Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum*. [Last accessed 2 May 2011] <http://www.gardnermuseum.org/about/press/2011>.

*Gentleman in Black*, 1633, and his only known seascape *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee*, 1633, an etching by Rembrandt entitled *Self-Portrait*, c.1634, Édouard Manet's *Chez Tortoni*, 1878-1880, Govaert Flinck's *Landscape with an Obelisk*, 1638, five works on paper by Edgar Degas, a Chinese bronze beaker or *Ku* from the Shang Dynasty, 1200-1100BC, and a bronzed finial in the form of an eagle taken from a Napoleonic flag, 1813-1814 [Figs. 4.1 - 4.13]. To date, none of the works have been recovered despite a \$5 million (£3.2 million) reward.

While the focus of the almost twenty-two year-long investigation has been on the recovery of artworks (the statute of limitations to prosecute the thieves has long expired) the museum has experienced a profound museological shift in the absence of the works. Tethered to its patron's restrictive will that prevents anything from being added or removed within the museum, the theft has been inadvertently incorporated into the permanent display at the Gardner. Several empty frames mark the places where objects once hung and the visual impact of these voids competes with the original aesthetic and narrative created by the museum's patron [Fig. 4.14].

Distinct from the case studies of the Louvre and Munch Museum in that these objects are still missing, this case study will explore the continuing effect that the theft has had on the Gardner Museum. It will give consideration to the impact of theft upon the unique condition of display at the museum, a setting underpinned by the precise organisation of object and space. Unlike the majority of the literature on the subject which laments the loss of the stolen artworks (but has left the effect of their absence on the space within the museum unexamined), this case study suggests

that the disruption caused by the missing objects assists a collection that was actually at risk of becoming static and introspective.

Furthermore, the theft forced the museum to find ways of working within the institutional restrictions imposed upon the collection to resist being defined by this event. While for many years this was a futile attempt waged against a formidable media presence that memorialised every anniversary of the theft, the determination of the museum to redefine itself as a forward-looking contemporary arts institution led to a contesting of the will. The result has enabled the museum to embark upon an extensive expansion project. Designed by Renzo Piano and due to open on 19 January 2012, the addition of a new wing to the Gardner Museum is set to test the potency of the void left behind by the missing paintings and reveal whether the theft will continue to be its dominant narrative.

### **Methodology and source material**

As this case study seeks to measure the effects of the theft on the condition of display at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, the approach that it will take begins by developing an understanding of the informing principles of the foundation of Fenway Court which is what the museum was called until its patron's death in 1924. Though this is a well-established history, the fact that the museum was effectively suspended in time and place since Gardner's death means that much of what happened to the space following the theft is rooted in the unique history of the collection and the restrictions imposed by a binding will.



Following this, the chapter will turn to an account of the theft which, like the other two case studies, concentrates on details that are relevant to discourses of museology, and in particular, space, as opposed to perpetrators and motives. This will include consideration of the problems caused by a lack of insurance, an ongoing and contentious FBI investigation, and unprecedented media attention that for years detracted from the direction in which that the museum wanted to move.

Finally, a major premise of this project is that the disruption caused by the theft was a positive factor in securing the future of the Gardner Museum. The case study will look at the ways in which the museum was forced to work within institutional and legal restrictions, which included leaving the empty frames on the walls, to find new ways of expanding its creative programme. Largely out of a desire to counter the public's association of the museum with the theft, director Anne Hawley embarked upon an ambitious strategy to ensure that the theft did not overwhelm the museum which led to an unprecedented contesting of Gardner's will. This chapter will consider how, in a move to overcome its victimised past, the museum was required to challenge the very legacy it vowed to uphold.

A large part of the literature surrounding the theft at the Gardner Museum comprises many newspaper articles since 18 March 1990. As the years passed and the case presented a lack of any credible leads or developments, the anniversary of the theft became marked by the media in a prominent way. As will be shown, the language of the reporting started to affect the atmosphere at the museum. The lamenting of the theft imprinted an image of victimised space upon public memory which the museum felt kept people away. This will be examined and compared to the

great deal of public interest expressed following the thefts at the Louvre and Munch Museum to consider whether the more private nature of the Gardner Museum had an impact on how the theft was received by the public. Moreover, the perpetual reporting of the theft over such a long duration produced a ‘piggybacking’ effect in the news in that a list of other notable art thefts tended to be attached to any new story on the Gardner case (and vice versa).

The lack of notable developments in the case has opened the subject to much speculation over the years and these theories play out primarily in the news, but occasionally in more substantial sources. Most recently, journalist Ulrich Boser wrote a book entitled, *The Gardner Heist: The True Story of the World’s Largest Unsolved Art Theft* (2008).<sup>407</sup> Boser inherited the case files of famed art detective Harold Smith when he passed away in February 2009. Smith represented several insurance companies including Lloyds of London and for over fifty years, investigated fine-art and jewellery thefts. For years, Smith had been trying to solve the Gardner case. His efforts became the subject of a documentary by Rebecca Dreyfus entitled *Stolen*, which was released in April 2006.<sup>408</sup> While both Boser and Dreyfus revisit many leads on the case, neither is able to achieve more than a comprehensive airing of possibilities.<sup>409</sup>

One of the most notable sources of this project is an interview with Anne Hawley, Director of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Hawley had started in the

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<sup>407</sup> Boser, Ulrich. 2008. *The Gardner Heist: The True Story of the World’s Largest Unsolved Art Theft* (New York, Harper Collins).

<sup>408</sup> Dreyfus, Rebecca (Director). 2006. *Stolen* (documentary film). Produced by Precision Films LLC. 85 minutes.

<sup>409</sup> As will be detailed later, Boser claims to uncover ‘new’ evidence that suggests a currently-incarcerated Boston con man named David Turner was one of the thieves.

role of director just five months before the museum was robbed. Notoriously difficult to obtain an interview with, and for obvious reasons reluctant to discuss much that pertains to the theft, Hawley devoted a great deal of time to answering questions during a meeting at the museum because of the academic and art historical motivations behind this project.<sup>410</sup>

The chapter will also look at the founding principles of the museum to create a developed sense of the building and collection. Comprehensive biographies of Gardner by Louise Hall Tharp, *Mrs. Jack: A Biography of Isabella Stewart Gardner* (1965) and Douglass Shand-Tucci, *The Art of Scandal: The Life and Times of Isabella Stewart Gardner* (1997) provided a deepened sense of the legacy that Gardner sought to leave to the public and the idiosyncratic way she went about it.<sup>411</sup> These sources express the sentimentality and individual taste that informed Gardner's legacy, protected by her precise will, that became the very thing that set the museum apart from larger institutions. Alongside this, articles by art historian Anne Higonnet and Gardner director Anne Hawley in 1989 and 1991 respectively, will be used to measure the condition of display before the theft and highlight the more practical challenges that Gardner Museum was facing at the time.<sup>412</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> In Boser 2008, he recalls how he tried for weeks unsuccessfully to obtain an audience with Hawley. She eventually relented. On the other hand, the Gardner Museum chose not to participate in the *Stolen* documentary.

<sup>411</sup> Tharp, Louise Hall. 1965. *Mrs. Jack: A Biography of Isabella Stewart Gardner* (New York, Little, Brown) and Shand-Tucci, Douglass. 1997. *The Art of Scandal: The Life and Times of Isabella Stewart Gardner* (New York: Harper Collins).

<sup>412</sup> Hawley, Anne. Spring 1991. 'A Venerable Museum Faces the Future: Guided Tour through the Gardner and Its Director's Mind', *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 25:1, 79-88; and Higonnet, Anne. May 1989. 'Where There's a Will...', *Art in America*, 77, 65-75.

This case study will look at the challenge the theft presented to Gardner's legacy, something the museum held sacred, the complexities it faced in the simultaneous attempt to protect both the informing principles of the institution and its future growth and sustainability – variables that were often at odds with each other. These sources also reveal that the museum, from its inception, has wrestled with the intricate balance between object safety and public access which provides an interesting look at early twentieth-century security in a house-museum.

### **Isabella Stewart Gardner's Fenway Court: Taste and sentiment**

Modelled after a fifteenth century Venetian palazzo, Fenway Court was directly inspired by Gardner's lifelong interest in Italian, in particular Venetian, art and architecture. During a trip to Italy in 1857 with her father Davis Stewart, she went to see the Poldi Pezzoli Palace in Milan where, at the time, the vast collection of ancient ceramics, bronzes, decorative arts of the Renaissance, books, manuscripts, arms, tapestries, Renaissance and Northern Renaissance paintings, as well as paintings from later periods, were being installed in rooms theatrically designed to suggest historical periods [Fig. 4.15]. Furthermore, when he died in 1879, Gian Giacomo Poldi Pezzoli had created a foundation for the museum '...for public use and benefit in perpetuity under the same regulations as for the Brera Art Gallery'.<sup>413</sup> The administration and direction of the foundation were entrusted to Giuseppe Bertini (former pupil of the Academy of Fine Arts of Brera), who in 1881 opened the museum to the public. This trip and her experience of the Poldi Pezzoli palace

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<sup>413</sup> 'Gian Giacomo Poldi Pezzoli', *Museo Poldi Pezzoli*. [Last accessed 10 August 2011]. <http://www.museopoldipezzoli.it/en/museum/history/giangiacomo.html>.

obviously had a profound impact on the seventeen-year old girl. A childhood friend recalled to Gardner in 1923, the year before she died,

You said to me...that if you ever inherited any money that was yours to dispose of, you would have a house...like the one in Milan filled with beautiful pictures and objects of art, for people to come and enjoy. And you have carried out the dream of your youth.<sup>414</sup>

Following the tragic death of their two-year old son in 1865, Gardner and her husband Jack began travelling across America, Europe and Asia accumulating a notable collection of artwork. Nearly seventy works in the collection were acquired with the help of Bernard Berenson, including Titian's *Rape of Europa*. In a further indication of the calibre of objects Gardner was collecting, one of her direct competitors was Edward Perry Warren, who left a substantial number of works to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

On 30 December 1898, within two weeks of her husband Jack's sudden death, Gardner hired architect Willard T. Sears to build a suitable home for her collection. Sears recorded in his diary,

Mrs. Gardner 'informed me that she had purchased a lot of land 100 ft. by 150 ft. on the Back Bay Park to build the Museum upon. That she wanted me to make new drawings and to include a small theatre with the Museum, the Museum to be one storey less in height than the other one drawn for her at 152 Beacon Street. She wanted the drawings as soon as possible so that they could be referred to in her will. She made no reference to the probable cost of the building'.<sup>415</sup>

Although Gardner would live another twenty-six years, she made mention of her desire to have a detailed will and include anything to do with Fenway Court in it

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<sup>414</sup> Goldfarb, Hillard T. 1995. *The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum: A companion guide and history* (Boston, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum), 6.

<sup>415</sup> Tharp 1965, 212.

from the outset. She purchased the land on which Fenway Court stands in several parcels, the first conveyance having been dated January 31, 1899. Subsequent purchases were made in April and July, 1899 and on February 26, 1900.

‘The Fenway’ was a popular new area in Boston created by landscape architect Frederick Law Olmstead, who, in 1878, had proposed a system of tidal gates and underground channels to drain and fill the Back Bay Fens, creating a ‘beneficial’ park landscape.<sup>416</sup> The isolation of the location of Fenway Court, on the far end of Olmstead’s new park, was very attractive to Gardner. In its present location, the building could have exposure to light and an open vista on all four sides [Fig. 4.16]. Simmons College moved next door only after the building of Fenway Court had begun (the college originally occupied a much smaller building than the present one), and construction for the new building of the Museum of Fine Arts, originally located at Copley Square, to its present site adjacent to Fenway Court, began after Fenway Court had opened. The Museum of Fine Arts opened to the public in November 1909, by which time Gardner had made most of her acquisitions and Fenway Court’s collection of European art was more distinguished than that of its neighbour. Thus, even since its inception, the Gardner Museum had stood in contrast to the MFA, protected by a more sheltered location, idiosyncratic collection and intimate condition of display.

In her 1965 biography of Isabella Stewart Gardner, which to date is still the most comprehensive, Louise Hall Tharp emphasizes the unique nature of Fenway Court. ‘Fenway Court was no echo of an earlier age. It had style, defiant of time,

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<sup>416</sup> Goldfarb 1995, 14.

originality seldom encountered – a life of its own'.<sup>417</sup> Gardner was part of that generation of wealthy Americans such as J.P Morgan, Henry Clay Frick and Henry E. Huntington who travelled abroad and amassing great art for display back in their home country. While many of her generation fell into the trap of 'buying whatever the dealers were offering', Gardner took particular care in selecting objects for her collection but was not concerned whether they fit a prescribed aesthetic. Her collection reflected an overarching interest in variety and sentiment. She did not seek approval from others in either the design or furnishing of Fenway Court and had quite specific ideas of how things should be.

For instance, a month before her sixty-first birthday, she climbed a ladder in the courtyard and began to paint the wall herself so as to show her personally appointed, Italian-speaking workmen exactly how she wanted the Venetian walls to look.<sup>418</sup> In June 1900, Gardner made almost daily changes in her plans, sometimes of only an inch or two, and always requiring new drawings and blueprints. She also supervised the removal of every column from the shed in which they were stored and the setting of each column according to her architect's record. However, even though she had bricks replaced if she thought they were slightly the wrong colour, she took her lunch just as the workmen did and contributed ten cents for oatmeal to be put in the drinking water – presumably to settle the mud it contained.<sup>419</sup> In a little over twenty-five years, Gardner amassed a collection of more than 2,500 objects at Fenway Court. The objects ranged from ancient Egypt to Matisse, comprising

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<sup>417</sup> Tharp 1965, 239.

<sup>418</sup> Tharp 1965, 236.

<sup>419</sup> Tharp 1965, 233.

paintings, sculpture, drawings, prints, historic furniture, ceramics, glassware, books and manuscripts. It is evident from her biographies and in the condition of display at the museum that Gardner was specific and precise in everything that she did.

The building of Fenway Court, and Gardner's involvement therein, is an exceptional account filled with many tales of her meticulous and rather stubborn character. She demanded weekly meetings with Sears, and poured over his every move. She was highly involved in every aspect of the planning and building of Fenway Court.

Mr. Sears might have hoped that a much-mellowed Mrs. Gardner would collaborate serenely with him on the alterations for the palace. Unfortunately, such was not the case. A harassed Mr. Sears in desperation sent over his grandson to see Mrs. Gardner, relying on her well-known fondness for young men. It didn't work. 'You'll go right back to the office, young man,' she said, 'and tell your grandfather to send me somebody who *knows* something!'<sup>420</sup>

Gardner even refused to permit steel construction, intervene regularly with the building inspector and arguing, correctly as it turned out, that the structure would be stable and secure if built according to Renaissance building principles.<sup>421</sup> In November 1901, Gardner told Sears that she wanted her servants to move into Fenway Court, even though there were no floors in the corridors and no treads on the stairs. Gardner gradually moved herself in a few weeks later; still more than a year before the palace would be finished.

Sears advised Gardner to sell her house at 152 Beacon Street as she was now sleeping at Fenway Court, but she was desperately sentimental about the house and

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<sup>420</sup> Tharp 1965, 298.

<sup>421</sup> Goldfarb 1995, 16.



her objects - the house was a wedding present from her father, and her husband and son had both lived and died there. Gardner therefore resolved to take as much of her old home to Fenway Court. In addition to opulent furniture, paintings and *objets d'art*, Gardner also brought with her less portable features such as an ornately carved mantelpiece and a scalloped white border that was cut from the house at Beacon Street to edge the walls of her new home [Fig. 4.17]. In the same photograph, other sentimental details include the fresh violets placed in a small silver vase on the table before the small portrait of *Christ Carrying the Cross*, attributed to the circle of Giovanni Bellini, c.1505-10. According to Morris Carter, the first director of the museum, the painting was Gardner's favourite and she often placed a vase of violets in front of it; the museum continues this tradition.<sup>422</sup> Also visible in the photograph, below Titian's *Rape of Europa*, c.1560-62, hangs a pale green moiré fabric, cut from a dress Gardner had made by couture designer Charles Frederick Worth in Paris.

Small intimate details such as these infuse and dictate the display at the museum; Gardner collected, built and arranged her palace according to an eclectic personal taste, completely unguided by convention. 'Just as she specified the paint colour and embedded each sculptural fragment into the fabric of the building, so Gardner carefully placed every object in her collection in a spatial situation she decreed to be permanent'.<sup>423</sup> The accounts of Fenway Court's construction illuminate Gardner's uncompromising attention to detail and her arrangement of the collection,

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<sup>422</sup> 'Christ Carrying the Cross', *Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum* [last accessed 10 May 2011]. [http://www.gardnermuseum.org/collection/artwork/3rd\\_floor/titian\\_room/christ\\_carrying\\_the\\_cross?filter=room:1773](http://www.gardnermuseum.org/collection/artwork/3rd_floor/titian_room/christ_carrying_the_cross?filter=room:1773).

<sup>423</sup> Higonnet 1989, 66.

which in light of her meticulous will can only be considered a conscious action, was calculated to show off her unique taste in a fixedly permanent manner.

### **Security and public access at the Gardner Museum in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century**

Sears began to worry about the expensive paintings, Renaissance furniture and art objects that were brought to Fenway Court long before the palace was completed; fire and theft were his main concerns.<sup>424</sup> Henry W. Swift, appointed by Gardner to look after her finances, had authorized \$50,000 of fire insurance but Gardner was so horrified at the cost that theft insurance was not taken out.<sup>425</sup> Anxious about the increasing value of her objects, when the museum was about to open to the public Gardner restricted the number of tickets sold and sent a statement to the press stating, 'tickets will be sent on application only to those properly identified'.<sup>426</sup> Upon opening on 1 January 1903, Gardner further restricted attendance to two hundred people per day for twenty days a year. Of the twenty open days per year, ten were at Easter, and ten at Thanksgiving. She also applied a \$1 fee to keep out the 'merely curious'.<sup>427</sup>

The admission charge indicates that Gardner had concerns over the accessibility of her collection. She designed special cabinets with swinging doors in which her drawings and prints were mounted so that they could be studied and yet protected from the light. Similarly, in the Long Gallery on the top floor of the

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<sup>424</sup> Tharp 1965, 237.

<sup>425</sup> Tharp 1965, 237.

<sup>426</sup> Tharp 1965, 224.

<sup>427</sup> Goldfarb 1995, 18.

museum, cases contain her editions of Dante and other rare early books and the visitor is invited to see her collection of historic autographs, manuscripts and photographs of a wide range of writers, actors and musicians. Gardner's desire for an accessible collection was balanced against a deep-rooted fear of anything happening to her objects.

The months leading up to the grand opening of Fenway Court illustrate Gardner's apprehension over anyone even seeing the palace before it was finished; she had a preoccupation for protecting the mystery of Fenway Court while it was being built. When working on the Music Room, Gardner was very concerned about the acoustics of the room. She wanted to have the Boston Symphony Orchestra test the room.<sup>428</sup> She proceeded to, prematurely in Sears' view, order down all scaffolding in the room as it was the last week before the Orchestra finished for the summer. With the exceptions of a very few friends, no one was permitted to see the 'palace' before it was built so this created a problem for testing the Symphony's acoustics. With a humorously eclectic sense of innovation and imagination, Gardner decided to invite the blind children from the Perkins Institution to come and hear the music so that the acoustics could be tested but the interior design of Fenway Court remained a mystery.<sup>429</sup> Tharp recounted in her biography,

It is said that the children from Perkins were brought from South Boston by horse-drawn omnibus. They were lead into the 'North Corridor' – as Mr. Sears called the 'Cloister' – where they took off their rubbers, the day being rainy. They placed them in pairs along the wall where they would know, by touch, how to find them again. But some over-zealous person gathered all the little rubbers up into

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<sup>428</sup> Tharp 1965, 235.

<sup>429</sup> Tharp 1965, 235.

one pile, so that chaos resulted after the concert. Mrs. Gardner helped sort out and re-mate the strayed galoshes. Acoustics had proved perfect. Mr. Sears would not be required to redesign the Music Room!<sup>430</sup>

Other early security concerns that Sears attended to included an installation of a telephone – which Gardner refused to answer – that would connect to the police station in case of intruders at the palace.<sup>431</sup>

Interestingly, Gardner never believed in making a contribution to the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company as recommended to her, instead she put her faith in her mansion's entry portal which contains Renaissance-period figures of Saints George and Florian; patron saints protecting believers from theft and fire [Fig. 4.18].

### **A Fixed and Introspective Collection**

In 1919, Isabella Stewart Gardner suffered the first of a series of strokes and died five years later, on 17 July 1924. Her will created an endowment of \$1 million and outlined stipulations for the support of the museum, including that the permanent collection not be significantly altered.<sup>432</sup> The museum is not allowed to sell any part of the collection (including the building), acquire new works, mount major exhibitions, or alter the display of the building and its contents. Gardner's will provides an example of vaulting ambition setting forth the parameters of her art museum and its administration. This excessively restrictive gift is tethered more to

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<sup>430</sup> Tharp 1965, 235.

<sup>431</sup> Tharp 1965, 245.

<sup>432</sup> 'Isabella Stewart Gardner', *Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum* [Last accessed 10 August 2011]. [http://www.gardnermuseum.org/about/isabella\\_stewart\\_gardner](http://www.gardnermuseum.org/about/isabella_stewart_gardner).

her notions of commemoration, than it is to the functionality of the art collection and the premises surrounding it. The will reads:

If anyone shall at any time change the general disposition or arrangement of any of the articles which have been placed on the first, second and third stories of the museum, then I give the land, museum, pictures, statuary, works of art, bric-a-brac, furniture, books and papers, and the shares of trust fund to the president and fellows of Harvard college in trust to sell in Paris, France.<sup>433</sup>

Gardner left a strict testament of demanding the maintenance of her museum exactly as she left it. Higonnet suggests that Gardner sensed that the museum was vulnerable in that there was little danger of the great paintings such as those by Botticelli or Sargent being neglected, but that there was a very real danger of Gardner's own creation – the museum itself – being dismantled.<sup>434</sup> It is specified in the will that nothing in her composition of the three exhibition floors of the museum could ever be altered, and that the fourth floor should be used as the living quarters of the director – from which the duties of overseer of the collection that Gardner herself performed during her lifetime could be transferred to each new director. This metaphorical role of homemaker is seen as Gardner's way of distinguishing the nature of the Gardner Museum's direction from the increasingly bureaucratic administrations of mainstream museums such as the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, just steps away from Fenway Court.

When Gardner died in 1924, her will appointed trustees and a director to preserve the museum and keep it open 'for the enjoyment of the public forever'.<sup>435</sup>

Hawley discusses how the museum has focused on conserving the collection,

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<sup>433</sup> Hawley 1991, 82.

<sup>434</sup> Higonnet 1989, 68.

<sup>435</sup> Hawley 1991, 82.

continuing the tradition of public musical concerts and year-round floral displays in the court however, she states that ‘remaining faithful to the letter of the will has made the Gardner become introspective’.<sup>436</sup> This idea of introspection is problematic if the Gardner does not want to become a mausoleum to its patron.

However, over the years opinion had been divided as to the degree of interpretation allowed by the will, particularly when balanced against the effort to continue Gardner’s creative legacy. Art historian Anne Higonnet feels that the trustees of the museum are presenting the strengths of the Gardner Museums as its weaknesses. ‘As it was designed the Gardner Museum is unique in the world, an art work we should treasure in itself. Revised, it becomes just another museum-machine competing with similar institutions for support’.<sup>437</sup> Echoing the juxtaposition of the Gardner Museum and its formidable neighbour, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston across the street, Higonnet is a conservative defender of the intimately private nature of the collection which sets the two apart.

In January 1989, the Gardner’s trustees began legal proceedings to seek a ‘reinterpretation’ of the will that would allow them to transform the fourth floor of the museum which, since Gardner’s death had been the private residence of the director, into office facilities for administrative and conservation functions. ‘Court approval of the trustees’ action is required because of the strictness of Gardner’s will. It includes specific provisions for the preservation of the exhibition spaces and for

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<sup>436</sup> Hawley 1991, 82.

<sup>437</sup> Higonnet 1989, 74.

the perpetuation of the directorship housed on site'.<sup>438</sup> A major critic of this move, Higonet argued that though not a conventional museum space, the fourth floor of the Gardner Museum was, 'in many respects the heart of the installation, for from it a residential overseer maintains the domestic character of the space as Gardner did in her time'.<sup>439</sup>

In *The American Scene* (1907), Henry James (a friend and frequent visitor) described the character of the Gardner Museum:

To attempt to tell the story of the wonderfully gathered and splendidly-lodged Gardner Collection would be to displace a little line that separates private from public property...It is in the presence of the results magnificently attained, the energy triumphant over everything, that one feels the fine old disinterested tradition of Boston least disturbed.<sup>440</sup>

Higonet points out, as James observed, that in the case of the Gardner Museum standard distinctions between private and public simply do not apply. 'Indeed, the Gardner's principle claim to historical significance is its unique subversion of conventional aesthetic (and museological) norms'.<sup>441</sup> In one sense, the rigid requirements of the will serve to protect the unique display of the collection however, as will be evidenced shortly, these same stipulations can be extremely restrictive in nature. Higonet's strong opposition to the conversion of the fourth floor is made very clear in her article of May 1989, 'Unfortunately the museum's trustees see the boundaries between private and public experience – boundaries that

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<sup>438</sup> Higonet 1989, 65.

<sup>439</sup> Higonet 1989, 65.

<sup>440</sup> James, Henry. 1907. *The American Scene* (London, Chapman & Hall), 254-255.

<sup>441</sup> Higonet 1989, 65.

Gardner herself so effectively blurred – as mere room dividers which they can rearrange according to their own priorities’.<sup>442</sup>

The arguments for the preservation of the status quo at the Gardner Museum highlight some interesting ideas. For instance, Higonnet acknowledges the tendency of ‘house-museums’, including the Frick Collection in New York, the Barnes Foundation in Pennsylvania, the Hill-Stead Museum in Farmington, Connecticut, the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., the Wallace Collection in London, and the Musée Jacquemart-André in Paris, to be perceived as monuments, planned and paid for by wealthy collectors. On the other hand, one way to avoid this is for the museum to present signs of being a home, bearing the imprint of the founder’s own values and creative vision and differentiating it from larger institutions. ‘This intimate bond between objects and their setting was so important to the founders that many of them protected their installations with detailed, binding wills’.<sup>443</sup> In most of these cases, specific clauses prohibit even temporary removal or displacement of the objects. As a result, works are almost never loaned from the Barnes, Hill-Stead, Wallace or Gardner collections.<sup>444</sup> And furthermore, until Hawley’s directorship began in September 1989, the director of the Gardner Museum was always required to live in-house, on the fourth floor.

As mentioned, Gardner’s will appointed trustees and a director to preserve the museum and keep it open for the public to enjoy for ever.<sup>445</sup> In following these

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<sup>442</sup> Higonnet 1989, 65.

<sup>443</sup> Higonnet 1989, 66.

<sup>444</sup> Higonnet 1989, 66.

<sup>445</sup> Hawley 1991, 82.



instructions the museum felt able to focus on conserving the collection, continuing the traditions of musical concerts for the public and year-round floral displays in the courtyard. Beyond this however, the activities of the museum become restricted by the stipulations in the will. As mentioned, director Anne Hawley feels the museum has become introspective.

It was no longer as it had been when its imaginative creator was alive: a centre of new ideas, a place where great artists came, a place where new work was presented, a place where people were drawn from all over the world because of Mrs. Gardner's fascination with the creative imagination. The museum turned inward in much the same way as Boston did during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>446</sup>

One of the greatest challenges the Gardner faced was how to work within the confines of a 'fixed collection' as stipulated by the will, considering financial pressures and conservation concerns, to avoid becoming a mausoleum to Isabella Stewart Gardner. Two primary problems were that the Gardner Museum had never been formally or academically curated so that by 1990, attendance had dwindled dramatically since it reached a peak in 1966.<sup>447</sup> Furthermore, the once-comfortable bequest no longer sustained the museum which was in need of critical upkeep.<sup>448</sup> In 1991, Hawley revealed that the bequest supplied just half of the museum's budget and that due to escalating costs, \$400,000 was needed to continue its present level of operation, before even giving consideration to the urgent need for many millions of

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<sup>446</sup> Hawley 1991, 82.

<sup>447</sup> Cotter, Holland. 31 March 1997. 'Despite Devastating Losses, the Gardner Museum Is Rebounding', *The New York Times* [Last Accessed 10 August 2011].

<sup>448</sup> Cotter, Holland. 31 March 1997. 'Despite Devastating Losses, the Gardner Museum Is Rebounding', *The New York Times* [Last Accessed 10 August 2011].  
<http://www.nytimes.com/1997/03/31/arts/despite-devastating-losses-the-gardner-museum-is-rebounding.html?pagewanted=2&src=pm>.

dollars to install conservation laboratories and a climate control system.<sup>449</sup> Thus, by the time of theft, the museum was struggling to be relevant in both financial and museological terms.

The perception of the Gardner Museum as introspective, as Hawley has claimed, can be linked not only to the restrictions imposed upon the collection by the will which prohibits anything from changing, but to the physical planning of the building.

Mrs. Gardner explained to her architect that she wanted the façade of a Venetian palace turned inward upon itself, away from the bleak New England where such a miracle of grace and ornament in architecture could never have occurred.<sup>450</sup>

That the main focal point of the building, the Venetian Court, is inward looking, or introspective, is a physical manifestation of the way in which the museum operates on a theoretical level [Figs. 4.19]. The courtyard is a physical articulation of Gardner's rejection or dismissal of things extraneous to Fenway Court and her precious art collection, and the sentimental elements she attached to each. The cold, plain exterior façade protects the overwhelmingly introspective character of the Gardner Museum [Fig. 4.20].

The space as a whole produces a powerful effect on a visitor in a way that emphasizes a general atmosphere over individual components. The intimate nature of the building is further reinforced by low light levels specified by Gardner adding authenticity to the Venetian palace-like setting [Figs. 4.21 and 4.22]. Nonetheless, by 1990 poor attendance figures indicated that the Gardner Museum had lost some of

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<sup>449</sup> Hawley 1991, 81.

<sup>450</sup> Tharp 1965, 217.

the relevance it once held. The physical and theoretical introspective nature of the collection was fixed in place by institutional restrictions that at the time prevented a consideration of ways in which the inward-looking building, low light levels and dark corridors could be better presented to the public.

### **The Theft, 18 March 1990**

At 01:24 on 18 March 1990 two thieves entered the side entrance of the museum at Palace Road. As stated, they gained entry into the museum by posing as Boston police officers claiming they were responding to a call. The guard on duty broke protocol and allowed them entry through the museum's security door.<sup>451</sup> Once inside, one of the thieves (only one did all the talking) claimed that they recognised the guard behind the desk, who was a music student at Berklee College, and that there was a warrant out for his arrest. The guard was asked to come out from behind the desk where the only alarm button was located. The guard was told to summon the other guard on duty to the security desk. Once he did this, the intruders ordered him to stand spread-eagled facing the wall and handcuffed him. When the second guard returned to the security desk they handcuffed him as well. The museum guards thought they were being arrested. When they asked what was happening, one of the thieves replied, 'You're not being arrested. This is a robbery. Don't give us any problems, and you won't get hurt'. The young guard replied, 'Don't worry, they

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<sup>451</sup> Policy dictated that no unknown person was allowed into the museum after hours, the guards claimed that they did not think this applied to police.

don't pay me enough to get hurt'.<sup>452</sup> Both guards were then taken to the basement where they were secured to pipes with their hands, feet, and heads duct taped. The two guards were placed 40 yards away from each other in the basement, where they remained, unharmed, until found the next morning.<sup>453</sup>

Twenty-four minutes had passed since the thieves first entered, and they would spend a total of eighty-one minutes in the museum. The details of the movements of the thieves are known by the reports (time-recorded soundings) of the museum's motion detector system. Useful for referral, *The Boston Globe* compiled the information and published a reconstruction of the theft using alarm times and eyewitness accounts [Fig. 4.23]. The motion detector soundings reveal that the thieves went immediately to the first floor, and then they separated at the top of the main stairs where one headed to the Dutch Room at the south end of the building and the other to the Short Gallery, a small room above the museum's main entrance.

In the Dutch Room, they stole three of four Rembrandt works that Gardner collected, the Vermeer, the Flinck landscape (which had previously been attributed to Rembrandt) and the Chinese bronze beaker or *Ku*. It seems as though they tried to remove the fourth Rembrandt, *Self-Portrait, Aged 23*, 1629, but it proved too difficult. The picture was left behind and discovered propped up against a chair the next morning. The portrait can be seen to the right of the door in Fig. 4.22. The thieves did not take care in handling the objects during the theft as evidenced by the

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<sup>452</sup> Kurkjian, Stephen, 13 March 2005. 'Secrets behind the largest art theft in history', *The Boston Globe*. [Last accessed 19 December 2006]. [http://www.boston.com/news/specials/gardner\\_heist/heist/](http://www.boston.com/news/specials/gardner_heist/heist/).

<sup>453</sup> 'Twenty-first Year Since the Theft of Thirteen Priceless Artworks from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston', Press release dated 10 March 2011, *Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum*. [Last accessed 2 May 2011] <http://www.gardnermuseum.org/about/press/2011>.

damaged frames left behind and this has led investigators to speculate that the thieves had little to no experience or knowledge about art. Vermeer's *Concert* was knocked out of the display box where it had been placed, by Gardner, on a tabletop [Fig. 4.24]. The same happened to Flinck's *Landscape with an Obelisk* which hung on the opposite side of the Vermeer [Fig. 4.25]. Rembrandt's *Storm on the Sea of Galilee* and *A Lady and Gentleman in Black* were cut from their frames and torn bits of canvas remain visible [Fig. 4.26]. Manet's *Chez Torton* was also knocked out of its frame and the wood casing was left on one of the chairs in the security supervisor's room. In the Short Gallery, the thieves tore five Degas drawings that had been on display in three frames and attempted to remove a Napoleonic banner from a frame. It appears that the many screws that held the frame together proved too difficult to open so they took the gilded eagle finial from above the frame.

The thieves checked on the guards in the basement twice, and sixty-four minutes after entering the building, readied for their departure. They removed the CCTV videotape from the recorder that had captured their images at the side entrance as well as elsewhere in the building. They tore the computer printout from the motion detector equipment, not realising that their movements had already been recorded on the computer's hard drive, thus this information is now known. Thirteen minutes later, they began their departure, gathering all the objects at the security desk and making two trips to their car. The guards in the basement did not hear the thieves leave and remained handcuffed and taped to their posts until police were summoned at 08:15 that morning.

### **Post-theft Implications for the Gardner Museum: The first wave**

In an interview in 2006, Gardner Director Anne Hawley stated that she saw the theft as having two ‘waves’. The first wave focused on the theft, investigation, damage control in the press and insurance issues (though the Gardner Museum was previously uninsured, it is now). The second wave is where the museum had to deal with the more museological issues such as conservation of the damaged frames, their re-hanging, labels, and upgrades to security.<sup>454</sup> For clarity, the chapter will divide the post-theft implications into these two categories. It is within the second category that the majority of attention is focussed and Hawley’s model will be expanded to include a principal discussion around the impact of the theft on the condition of display at the Gardner.

Following the immediate closure of the museum for an official investigation and forensic examination, including technical analysis of the frames for traces of DNA evidence, the investigation did not turn up many leads. It should be noted that as an ongoing investigation, many details, such as the forensic results, have not been released to the public. Interviews with the guards on duty showed that one of them had already given notice that he was quitting and was serving one of his last shifts, and that the other had never worked a nightshift. Furthermore, the two had never worked together before. Though it made for poor museum security, they were not considered suspects in the robbery.

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<sup>454</sup> Interview with Anne Hawley, Director of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, 25 August 2006.

In 1994, Hawley received what is considered the last tip that seemed legitimate. An anonymous letter was written to the museum. The writer said he could facilitate the return of the paintings in exchange for \$2.6 million (£1.28 million) and full immunity from prosecution for the thieves and those who held the paintings. The author showed considerable knowledge of the paintings and of the international art market. He said the paintings were being stored in archival conditions and were not yet sold. He indicated that there was a need to expedite negotiations because the paintings were being held in a country where a buyer who was unaware they were stolen could claim legal ownership.

The writer of the letter proposed that the museum respond to his ransom offer by arranging to have the numeral ‘1’ inserted in the US-foreign dollar exchange listing for the Italian lira that would be published in *The Boston Sunday Globe* on 1 May 1994. On that Sunday, a ‘1’ was listed a few spaces in front of the actual US dollar exchange rate for the lira. *The Boston Globe* reportedly agreed to cooperate as they saw this gesture as a ‘community service decision’. The paper had also negotiated to receive first word if the gesture led to the painting’s return.<sup>455</sup>

The following week, the museum received a second letter. The author was encouraged to see that the museum was interested in negotiating an exchange, but alarmed by the aggressive reaction by federal, state, and local law enforcement after the museum received his letter. *The Boston Globe*, who has a copy of the letter in its investigative file, reported that the writer asked whether the museum and authorities

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<sup>455</sup> Kurkjian, Stephen. 13 March 2005. ‘The Gardner Heist’, *The Boston Globe*. [Last accessed 19 December 2006] [http://www.boston.com/news/specials/gardner\\_heist/heist/](http://www.boston.com/news/specials/gardner_heist/heist/).

were interested in getting the paintings returned, or in arresting a low-level intermediary. ‘YOU CANNOT HAVE BOTH’, he wrote in upper case letters, ‘Right now I need time to both think and start the process to insure confidentiality of the exchange’.<sup>456</sup> What this decision was is unclear, as the Gardner Museum never heard from him again. In the years since the letter was written, federal prosecutors have dropped their opposition to anyone wishing to return the artwork. They will also forego charges against anyone who facilitated the safe return. As for the thieves, the statute of limitations for prosecution ran out in the mid-1990s.<sup>457</sup>

The lack of progress on the case proved frustrating for the Gardner Museum and exposed some regrets. In the first instance, the Gardner Museum did not have insurance against the theft. If they did, they would have had a representative (loss adjuster) to assist them in dealing with the aftermath of the theft which includes keeping on top of official investigations and the critical ‘damage control’ element of dealing with the media. Mark Dalrymple, experienced chartered loss adjuster, discussed the importance of his role in an interview with Sandy Nairne. He stated, ‘I work pretty much on a confidential, one-to-one basis because information is crucially important...where we decide what the press should know or shouldn’t know.’<sup>458</sup> In an interview in 2006, Hawley confirmed that a major regret was not having a loss adjuster representing the museum.<sup>459</sup> Not to mention the drain of constant media

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<sup>456</sup> Kurkjian, Stephen. 13 March 2005. ‘The Gardner Heist’, *The Boston Globe*. [Last accessed 19 December 2006] [http://www.boston.com/news/specials/gardner\\_heist/heist/](http://www.boston.com/news/specials/gardner_heist/heist/).

<sup>457</sup> Kurkjian, Stephen. 13 March 2005. ‘The Gardner Heist’, *The Boston Globe*. [last accessed 19 December 2006] [http://www.boston.com/news/specials/gardner\\_heist/heist/](http://www.boston.com/news/specials/gardner_heist/heist/).

<sup>458</sup> Interview between Sandy Nairne and Mark Dalrymple, London, 29 June 2007. As quoted in Nairne, Sandy. 2011. *Art Theft and the Case of the Stolen Turners* (London, Reaktion), 266.

<sup>459</sup> Interview with Anne Hawley, Director of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, 25 August 2006.



scrutiny, she felt that the museum was stretched thin by working with privately hired detectives, local police and the FBI.

In particular, Hawley felt that the Gardner Museum would have benefited from their own representative to deal with the authorities. Unimpressed with the FBI's investigation, the Gardner Museum has filed charges against the FBI with respect to a perceived mishandling of the case.<sup>460</sup> Although the point was not elaborated upon, a development in 1998 occurred that might shed some light on the museum's uneasy history with the FBI. That year, the local FBI office had been corrupted by a long partnership with James 'Whitey' Bulger, the notorious South Boston crime boss and FBI informant who had been a suspect in the Gardner theft from the beginning. Because Bulger and his associates had helped the FBI bring down Boston's leading Italian crime family (which also opened up new territory for Bulger), he was offered protection. Bulger happily took advantage of the opportunity to expand his criminal empire, co-opting some of his FBI handlers in the process. A bureau supervisor took payments from him, and an agent named John Connolly warned him of impending wiretaps and shielded him from investigation by other police agencies. When a prosecutor and a grand jury secretly charged Bulger in 1995 with racketeering and other crimes, Connolly tipped Bulger that an arrest was imminent, and he skipped town. Connolly is serving a ten-year prison sentence for conspiring with Bulger, and some eighteen agents have been implicated in the scandal.

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<sup>460</sup> Hawley would not elaborate on the point. Interview with Anne Hawley, Director of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, 25 August 2006.

Bulger had been on the run since 1994 until he was captured in Santa Monica, California on 22 June 2011. He was later extradited to Massachusetts where he has pleaded not guilty to forty-eight charges, including nineteen counts of murder, extortion, money laundering, obstruction of justice, perjury, narcotics distribution and weapons violations.<sup>461</sup> Such was the prominence of his position in criminal circles in Boston at the time of the theft that it is highly probable that at the very least he might know something about the missing objects; that the Gardner theft trail grew cold once Bulger went into hiding further suggests a link. Robert Wittman, the former head of the FBI's art squad who helped investigate the Gardner theft said, 'If he was interested, he could have found out what was going on. I think there's a good chance he knows something.'<sup>462</sup> Though only speculation at this point, if Bulger did have information about the Gardner theft he may barter it for 'prison comforts', in which case, some very welcome news about the theft may surface.

With this background in mind, it is not difficult to see how some critics, including Hawley, remain sceptical about the bureau's ability to solve the case. In a 2005 article in the *Smithsonian Magazine*, Hawley stated, 'Their investigation was possibly corrupted and compromised from the start. We assumed that things were

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<sup>461</sup> Lawrence, Janelle and Chris Dolmetsch. 6 July 2011. 'James "Whitey" Bulger Pleads Not Guilty to 48 Charges in Boston Court', *Bloomberg*. [Last accessed 7 July 2011]. <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-07-06/james-whitey-bulger-pleads-not-guilty-to-48-charges-in-boston-court.html>.

<sup>462</sup> Felch, Jason. 23 June 2011. 'What does Whitey Bulger know about the 1990 Gardner Museum Art Heist?' *Los Angeles Times* [last accessed 7 July 2011]. <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/culturemonster/2011/06/what-does-whitey-bulger-know-about-the-1990-gardner-museum-art-heist.html>.

proceeding according to schedule – then this came up!’<sup>463</sup> While she praises FBI Special Agent Geoffrey Kelly (currently on the case) as a diligent investigator and allows that the FBI’s Boston office has cleaned itself up, an underlying apprehension about the FBI’s involvement may be indicated by the unprecedented step Hawley made in inviting those with information about the Gardner theft to contact her – not the FBI.

If people are afraid to step forward or hesitant to speak with the FBI, I encourage them to contact me directly, and I will promise anonymity. I know that there’s a child, a mother, a grandmother, or a lover – someone out there – who knows where the pieces are. Anyone who knows this has an ethical and moral responsibility to come forward. The most important thing is to get the art back, not to prosecute the people who took it.<sup>464</sup>

Over the years, progress on the case has been slow and many theories have emerged. In 2005, FBI Special Agent Geoffrey Kelly stated, ‘I would be happy to knock it down to one or two theories’.<sup>465</sup> He acknowledges a wide range of possibilities that have not been excluded by the investigation, including that the Gardner theft was arranged by the Irish Republican Army (IRA) to raise money or to bargain for the release of jailed comrades; that it was organized by Bulger; and finally, that it was inspired by Myles J. Connor Jr., a notorious art thief in New England.

Though he was in jail at the time of the theft, Connor admitted that he had considered robbing the Gardner Museum in the late 1980s. The plan involved

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<sup>463</sup> Poole, Robert M. July 2005. ‘Ripped from the Walls (and the Headlines): Fifteen years after the greatest art theft in modern history the mystery may be unravelling’, *Smithsonian Magazine* [last accessed 1 July 2006]. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/ripped.html>.

<sup>464</sup> Poole 2005, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/ripped.html>.

<sup>465</sup> Poole, Robert M. July 2005. ‘Ripped from the Walls (and the Headlines): Fifteen years after the greatest art theft in modern history the mystery may be unravelling’, *Smithsonian Magazine* [last accessed 1 July 2006]. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/ripped.html>.

dressing as police officers to get inside the museum, but Connor was arrested and sent to prison before he and his associate Bobby Donati could commit the robbery. Connor went as far as discussing what they would take: Connor wanted Titian's *Rape of Europa*, Donati wanted the bronze finial.<sup>466</sup>

The theory that Ulrich Boser puts forward in *The Gardner Heist: The True Story of the World's Largest Unsolved Art Theft* (2008), is that one of the thieves was David Turner, a career-criminal currently serving a thirty-eight year sentence for a 1999 armed bank robbery. In researching for his book, Boser interviewed an eyewitness who claims he saw the two men in the car outside the Gardner Museum on the night of the theft. The eyewitness recalled Turner's distinctive almond-shaped eyes as being similar to the eyes of the suspect he saw on the night of the robbery, which he had originally described as Asian. But Turner has never admitted to robbing the Gardner Museum or knowing where the art is hidden, even in an attempt to reduce his current prison sentence.<sup>467</sup> When Boser confronted Turner with his evidence, Turner wrote to say that Boser should put him on the cover of his book, and then ceased all communication.<sup>468</sup>

Perhaps a reflection of a flagging investigation, the initial reward of \$1 million (£640,000) for information leading to the recovery of the paintings was increased to \$5 million (£3.2 million). This is believed to be the largest bounty ever

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<sup>466</sup> Connor claims Donati and another man, David Houghton, confessed to him that they robbed the Gardner. That the finial was taken – for reasons the FBI has never understood – might support this theory. Boser, Ulrich. 2008. *The Gardner Heist: The True Story of the World's Largest Unsolved Art Theft* (New York, Harper Collins), 141.

<sup>467</sup> Boser 2008, 107.

<sup>468</sup> Turner had his lawyer send Boser a letter requesting him to have no further contact with Turner, and notified Boser that Turner no longer provides him with consent to attribute any statements to him. Boser 2008, 200.

offered by a private institution.<sup>469</sup> Boser claims that reward posted by the Lindbergh family is believed to be the second largest reward. In 1932, \$75,000 USD (\$1.1 million, or £711,000 in today's currency) was offered for information on the kidnapping of their child.<sup>470</sup> The Gardner's reward is surpassed only by the \$25 million (£16 million) offered by the Federal Bureau of Investigation for information leading directly to the apprehension or conviction of Osama Bin Laden.<sup>471</sup> Incidentally, the second 'Most Wanted Fugitive' behind Osama Bin Laden was James 'Whitey' Bulger. In the meantime, the statute of limitations for prosecution has expired and the sizeable reward remains unclaimed in a disheartening reflection of the current state of the official investigation.

Furthermore, Hawley mentioned that security upgrades were part of the first wave of the theft. In contrast to the Louvre and Munch Museum, the Gardner Museum never really came under fire in the media for their security. The CCTV cameras were operational, museum security was considered a priority of the collection and policies were up to date. Two guards were on night duty, and but for the decision of a young guard to let the thieves walk right into the building (albeit under the disguise of police officers) the policy was sound. Therefore, security upgrades were more subtle in nature. The biggest change was the hiring of Anthony Amore as Director of Security in September 2005. Amore's background and

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<sup>469</sup> 'Twenty-first Year Since the Theft of Thirteen Priceless Artworks from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston', Press release dated 10 March 2011, *Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum*. [Last accessed 2 May 2011] <http://www.gardnermuseum.org/about/press/2011>.

<sup>470</sup> Boser 2008, 58-59.

<sup>471</sup> See poster 'FBI Ten Most Wanted Fugitives: Usama Bin Laden', *FBI*. [Last accessed 2 May 2011] <http://www.fbi.gov/wanted/topten/usama-bin-laden>.

professional experience said as much about the deep fears for the safety of the collection as any physical change did.

With over fourteen years of national security, law, intelligence, and crisis management experience with federal government agencies, Amore's experience drew a parallel with the airport-like security measures introduced at the Munch Museum. The Gardner Museum presented Amore like a human shield,

Amore served with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Transportation Security Administration (TSA) as a key advisor to the Federal Security Director at Logan International Airport in Boston, where he oversaw the training, equipping and deployment of more than 1000 federal screeners and the implementation of the nation's most advanced checked baggage screening program as part of the federal response to the attacks of September 11, 2001. As Assistant Federal Security Director for Screening and for Regulatory Inspections, he was also responsible for overseeing all security screening operations and the enforcement of federal transportation security laws and regulations at Logan Airport, as well as at Hanscom Field and Worcester Airport...At the FAA, Amore was instrumental in the reorganization and regionalization of national security efforts post-September 11th and was the agency's lead agent responding to the attempted terrorist attack by Richard Reid, the so-called 'Shoe Bomber' in December 2001.<sup>472</sup>

While the Gardner museum did not physically build airport-like security into its architecture in the way the Munch Museum did, Amore's presence could be seen as a representation of it.

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<sup>472</sup> Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum Press Release, 10 March 2006. 'New Director of Security Anthony Amore Brings Fourteen Years of Federal Law Enforcement and Security Experience to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum', *Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum*. [Last accessed 30 March 2006]. [http://www.gardnermuseum.org/press\\_releases/amore\\_security\\_director.pdf](http://www.gardnermuseum.org/press_releases/amore_security_director.pdf).

### **Post-theft Implications for the Gardner Museum: The second wave**

In turning to the more museological issues of the second wave of the theft, it should be noted that although Hawley mentioned the pressure of dealing with the media as part of the first wave, it will be discussed here in the second due to the length of time that has passed and to make the argument that the coverage of the theft in the media has had a direct impact on the public's perception of the museum and upon the condition of display therein.

Some of the more puzzling aspects that remain unanswered include why the thieves took five Degas pen and ink sketches, but left behind a Michelangelo nearby. The motions detectors also show that the thieves did not even bother to go to the second floor, where Titian's *The Rape of Europa* hangs, one of the most important and valuable works in the collection. Furthermore, the postage stamp-sized Rembrandt etching that was stolen in the 1990 theft had been stolen once before, in the only other notable case of theft at the Gardner Museum. In 1970, an accomplice smashed a paper bag filled with light bulbs on the gallery floor diverting the guard's attention long enough for the thief to escape with the work. While the thieves were never caught, an art dealer returned the drawing a few months later. He said someone gave it to him who found it on a New York subway train.

In a subject that raises more questions than it answers, the lack of resolution of a high-profile case brimming with plausible suspects opens itself to considerable speculation on behalf of journalists, historians, novelists and the general public. The narrative has become so big that Hawley fears that the theft has become the Gardner

Museum's 'main story'; the first thing people associate with the museum. She also believes that sensationalised media accounts have caused the museum to become inextricably linked to the theft and that this has had an impact on low visitor attendance.<sup>473</sup> Hawley sees the Gardner Museum portrayed as a victim in the press and current literature and thinks this keeps visitors at bay, reluctant to visit, at least in the first decade following the theft.

Because the Gardner does not track visitor attendance adequately, information supporting this is not available.<sup>474</sup> Hawley was, however, quite surprised to learn that attendance had increased at the Louvre and Munch Museum following those thefts. In her experience, she thinks the atmosphere surrounding the Gardner Museum after the theft presents difficulties for the public which are tied up in ideas of danger and victimisation with respect to the intimacy of Fenway Court.<sup>475</sup> Without accurate attendance figures it is impossible to measure whether attendance was affected by the theft at the Gardner Museum, but it would have been interesting to measure whether the more private nature of the Gardner Museum had any impact on those figures. In some reports after the robbery, visitors seemed to claim personal attachments to the museum.

The day after the robbery, a woman who was a frequent visitor to the museum wrote to Karen Haas, the museum's acting curator. She said that the museum is 'like no other place in the world', where patrons could 'easily remember

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<sup>473</sup> Interview with Anne Hawley, Director of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, 25 August 2006.

<sup>474</sup> This was the official response to my request on 25 August 2006.

<sup>475</sup> Interview with Anne Hawley, Director of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, 25 August 2006.



details, and locations, and think of certain corners as especially our own'.<sup>476</sup> In the same article as above, it is noted that a well-dressed woman in her 40s came to the museum the week after the theft with a bouquet of yellow tulips. She presented the flowers to an employee and said, 'Yellow is for hope'. The flowers were displayed on a conference desk outside Hawley's office.<sup>477</sup> Though not overly significant, this is a small parallel to the flowers that visitors brought to the Louvre after the disappearance of the *Mona Lisa*.

In the autumn of 2006, a book was published by journalist Simon Houpt entitled *Museum of the Missing: A History of Art Theft*. It is a prime example of the sensationalism of the theft that Hawley felt was damaging image of the Gardner Museum. Houpt writes,

When Isabella Stewart Gardner died in 1924, her will decreed that her museum remain as she left it, effectively frozen in time. For museum administrators around the world who have lost their art to thieves, time is indeed frozen on the day of their loss; like a loved one who disappears without leaving any trace, the missing art makes it difficult to move on. So time stands still in the Dutch Room, stuck not in the 1920s as Gardner desired, but on March 18, 1990, the last date the parlour was altered in any significant way, when its heart was ripped out and secreted away from the everyday world.<sup>478</sup>

More recently, a letter to the editor appeared in *The Boston Globe* that indicates sentimental attachment to the museum and the missing pictures has not diminished over the years.

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<sup>476</sup> French, Desiree. 24 March 1990. 'Gardner Patrons Show their Support', *The Boston Globe*. Arts and Film, 11.

<sup>477</sup> French, Desiree. 24 March 1990. 'Gardner Patrons Show their Support', *The Boston Globe*. Arts and Film, 11.

<sup>478</sup> Houpt, Simon. 2006. *Museum of the Missing: A History of Art Theft* (New York, Sterling Publishing), 11.

TO THOSE who have the painting:

March 18, 1990, more than 20 years ago, my heart cried out: 'The Storm on the Sea of Galilee' had been stolen along with a number of other valuable pieces of art. Twenty years later, my heart still cries out.

I had been fortunate. I had gazed upon the painting and pondered its meaning. Rembrandt urges us to consider taking a stormy sail with the apostles and Christ upon the sea of life. Rembrandt himself, who is believed to have depicted his image gazing out to us from the ship, invites us on board. The artist represents us, humanity with Christ.

After the heist, when I visited the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston, I saw the blank spot and cried. My son and daughter, having never seen the painting, will never be blessed with the experience that only the original can provide. Countless others are being deprived of Rembrandt's wish to inspire us.

Twenty years. It has been long enough. To those who have the painting, I say: Be good and return the piece; the world needs it. You will be forgiven; it is Christmastime. No questions asked. You have had this artwork long enough. Just send it.

P. Nelson

*Belmont*<sup>479</sup>

While on the one hand these stories perpetuate Hawley's fear of the theft overwhelming the museum, they also sustain public attention on the theft which is important to the investigation. It is publicity that cannot be bought, and on some level must contribute to the better attendance figures that have been hinted at by the museum in recent years.

The personal nature of the theft is also felt by the museum, as suggested by an image of a forlorn-looking museum guide at the entrance to the Dutch Room which

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<sup>479</sup> Nelson, P. 21 December 2011. 'Over 20 years later, still pained by void where work of art should hang' Letters to the Editor, *The Boston Globe*. [Last accessed 22 December 2011] <http://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/letters/2011/12/21/over-years-later-still-pained-void-where-work-art-should-hang/oxAmnZScTq5S3O795z90YP/story.html>.

is roped off by police tape [Fig. 4.27]. Furthermore, Hawley equates the loss caused by the theft with the loss of a family member.<sup>480</sup> She has mentioned this in the press several times. For instance,

It's been like a death in the family. I've never really recovered from the loss or stopped mourning. This has been a real tragedy, not just for Boston, but for the world. Art exists for the beholder, and to believe that it would be forever lost, hidden in a warehouse someplace, never again to be appreciated, is unspeakably sad.<sup>481</sup>

Hawley sees the loss of the paintings as something very personal to the Gardner Museum, and views the empty frames on the walls as a mourning gesture.<sup>482</sup> To explore this idea further and measure the effect of the empty frames on the condition of display at the Gardner Museum, consideration is given to Carol Duncan's study of 'donor memorials' in the seminal *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (1995).<sup>483</sup> It should be noted however, that in the chapter on donor memorials wherein she gives detailed and persuasive accounts of mausoleum and tomb-like atmospheres, memorials and loss, Duncan refers multiple times to the Gardner Museum but never mentions the theft, or that some of the objects she is referring to are no longer hanging in the context in which she discusses them. Duncan states,

My aim is to get at the way certain donor memorials – whatever their architectural formats – build into their rituals especially potent memorializing contents. The Isabella Stewart Gardner museum, for example, with its prescribed flower arrangements, lit candles, and other

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<sup>480</sup> Interview with Anne Hawley, Director of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, 25 August 2006.

<sup>481</sup> Butler, Ed. 18 November 2000. 'The Art of the Heist', *The Guardian* [Last accessed 10 August 2011]. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2000/nov/18/arttheft.art>.

<sup>482</sup> Interview with Anne Hawley, Director of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, 25 August 2006.

<sup>483</sup> Duncan, Carol. 1995. *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London, Routledge). See Chapter Four: 'Something Ethereal: the Donor Memorial'.

personal reminders, inevitably structures one's visit as a call paid to the departed donor.<sup>484</sup>

As former residences, donor memorials are unpredictable collections structured as a ritual enactment of a visit to an idealised (albeit absent or deceased) donor.<sup>485</sup>

Briefly, Duncan makes two interesting points in her discussion of donor memorials. First, she acknowledges that in such a setting, the modern visitor is not quite a guest as they are always under security and surveillance. The visitor is limited to looking, admiring, and perhaps envying such displays of wealth and taste.<sup>486</sup> This creates a physical barrier (exemplified by security measures such as rope barriers) as well as a theoretical barrier (overt displays of class separation emerge in this context). As seen earlier in the chapter, the lengths to which Gardner went to keep her collection private show that visitors were treated with as much mistrust during her lifetime, as her 'guests', as after her death.

Second, Duncan uses the Dulwich Picture Gallery, London as an example of a donor memorial that joins into a single ritual space a mausoleum and an art gallery.<sup>487</sup> This is achieved with the small rotunda and mausoleum which hold the three sarcophagi containing the remains of the gallery's donors: Noel Joseph Desenfans, his wife, and Sir Francis Bourgeois.<sup>488</sup> Crucially, and as Duncan mentions, it is not that mausoleums themselves were unusual in the early nineteenth century; it is the combination of art gallery and mausoleum, its 'double display of

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<sup>484</sup> Duncan 1995, 88 – 89.

<sup>485</sup> Duncan 1995, 72.

<sup>486</sup> Duncan 1995, 74.

<sup>487</sup> Duncan 1995, 84.

<sup>488</sup> Sir John Soane was a close friend of Bourgeois and took on the project without a fee and saw it through to after Bourgeois's death. While the Dulwich Picture Gallery opened in 1811, the mausoleum monument was completed in 1817.

pictures and death' that makes it different. 'At Dulwich, the two elements have become a single totality, perhaps best understood as a mausoleum expanded into an art gallery (rather than an art gallery with a mausoleum in it)'.<sup>489</sup>

At the Gardner Museum, with its introspective and intimate display entrenched permanently by her will, the art collection and the theft have been joined in a single totality. This is best illustrated by the images of the empty frames that have been left on the walls in the Dutch Room where Rembrandt's *A Lady and Gentleman in Black* and *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee* were slashed from their frames by thieves [Fig. 4.26]. For comparison, the Dutch Room before the theft [Fig. 4.28] presented Rembrandt's *Storm on the Sea of Galilee* and the double portrait *A Lady and Gentleman in Black*, along with six others, which were purchased through Bernard Berenson in 1898 by Isabella and her husband Jack just a few months before Mr. Gardner died.<sup>490</sup> Once installed in the Dutch Room at Fenway Court, these two pictures, purchased together, have hung just a few feet from each other ever since. By their conspicuous absence, these objects are given a new priority.

According to Hawley, one suggestion for overcoming the impact the theft has had on the identity of the Gardner Museum is to take down the empty frames.<sup>491</sup> This would be not only a major symbolic gesture, but also one that would have a unique mix of legal and museological implications. First, the will would have to be contested, likely on grounds of exceptional circumstances, while the Gardner

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<sup>489</sup> Duncan 1995, 85.

<sup>490</sup> Tharp 1965, 207.

<sup>491</sup> At the time of the interview (25 August 2006), Hawley claimed there is a wealthy collector of Dutch Art with significant influence at the Gardner Museum who was keen to see the empty frames removed. It may have been that he had some suitable 'replacements' but this information was not forthcoming in the interview.

Museum trustees ensured they were not jeopardizing the future of the collection by doing something specifically prohibited by the will. Second, two works of art would have to be selected to fill the empty spaces. These works would have the distinction of not only being ‘replacements’ for something lost (or mourned even), but also the only two things in the collection not chosen or personally arranged by Gardner herself.<sup>492</sup> It is probable that works of Dutch origin would be selected, in keeping with the theme of the Dutch Room, but Hawley hinted that she has been offered works in the past to replace the empty frames and she declined.<sup>493</sup>

The empty frames have been hanging on the wall for almost twenty-two years. They were removed initially following the theft and sent to conservation where they were tested for evidence, such as fingerprints and DNA, by police. Then they had to be cleaned and repaired due to damage sustained in the theft. Torn bit of canvas were left on the frames and not removed, and they are now one of the most noticeable and noteworthy elements of the Gardner Museum. Obviously such a dramatic aspect raises public curiosity and for this reason, labels had to be introduced to explain the presence of the empty frames. This runs in contradiction to Isabella Stewart Gardner’s wishes for people to react to the art and not be distracted; she refused to post labels and but for the exception of the empty frames, the museum had continued this tradition. Instead, visitors are encouraged to purchase guidebooks,

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<sup>492</sup> Notable exceptions are the temporary contemporary works in ground floor exhibition space, the slight changes in 1926 to the Tapestry Room, and a marble sculpture purchased by Gardner but which only arrived after her death.

<sup>493</sup> Interview with Anne Hawley, Director of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, 25 August 2006.

audio guides, or help themselves to handouts printed in various languages which are on hand in each room.

Thus, it is incongruous with Gardner tradition that labels were posted inside the empty frames left in the Dutch Room [Fig. 4.29]. These labels explain to the visitor that Rembrandt's *Storm on the Sea of Galilee* and *A Lady and Gentleman in Black* were cut from their frames on the night of theft. The empty frames were obviously deemed in need of explanation by the Gardner Museum. Thinking about the functions of labels in a museological context, they remain one of the simplest means of conveying information to visitors. 'Labels are a basic means by which a museum transforms a collection of objects into a storytelling exhibition that communicates effectively with a chosen audience.'<sup>494</sup> Since museums seek to convey information about objects on display in a concise yet understandable way, labels, which come in a variety of forms, serve to educate the public on a specific aspect of the collection.

Moreover, this simple gesture has incorporated the theft into the display space in a very traditional manner. The theft, as an object on display, has a frame, a label, and is explained to the public in the visitor guide, audio guide, and in a separate handout available in the Dutch Room. This information is available in multiple contexts – visual, aural, verbal. The handout welcomes visitors to seek additional information collected in a folder available at the museum information desk

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<sup>494</sup> Alexander, Edward P. 1993. *Museums in Motion: An Introduction to the History and Function of Museums* (Nashville, American Association for State and Local History), 183.

on the ground floor. But most importantly, no other objects in the collection have this distinction.

This special treatment draws a parallel with the way in which the security measures at the Louvre and Munch Museum following the recovery of the respective missing paintings singled out those objects from the rest of the collection. Even in their absence, the Gardner's stolen objects are treated differently to the rest of the collection. This subverts the original condition of display at the museum which relied on the emphasis of an atmosphere over individual components.

Today, not only has Gardner's legacy become memorialised within the museum; so has the theft. However, over the years and through the sensationalised reporting of the theft, it has become taken for granted that the empty frames left hanging on the wall are a permanent visual reminder of the theft and that this creates a sad, mournful atmosphere. Though of course this is one such impression, such an atmosphere must not be confused with that which existed before the theft (recall the opinion of Anne Hawley that the Gardner was in danger of becoming fixed and introspective – and the ways in which it was). It seems pertinent to draw attention to the power of display within museological space – just as it can memorialise the personality or tastes of its patron, perhaps even with a twinge of mourning their passing, it can also memorialise a specific and dramatic event. Incorporated into the same display space by the empty frames, the legacy of Isabella Stewart Gardner was forced to compete with a narrative of criminality, absence and loss. In a museum that was struggling to remain relevant to its audience, it is suggested that the second, more powerful narrative of the theft grew dominant.



The Gardner Museum has remained very transparent with respect to their loss. The museum has an entire section of its website dedicated to the theft. Details of the theft are noted, along with a message from Director Anne Hawley:

We remain confident that these rare and important treasures will be returned to the Gardner Museum and enjoyed again by the general public. These works have the power to inspire thinking and creativity, two processes essential to a civil society. Isabella Stewart Gardner, this museum's founder, understood that when she left them 'for the education and enjoyment of the public forever'.<sup>495</sup>

Following the overview of the theft is a description of the reward and details of who to contact with any information. The press releases are issued on the anniversaries of the theft, updated yearly. There is a link to a press statement with further details of the theft that includes images and descriptions of the stolen objects. The press statement also includes a message directed at the thieves or whoever has the objects. Hawley advises whoever is holding the stolen art that in order to protect the art, they must be stored in conditions that control for swings in temperature and humidity – ideally at 70 degrees Fahrenheit and 50% humidity.<sup>496</sup> The disclosure of the large amount of detail indicates a willingness to be seen as open and transparent about the theft.

The only notable change to the presentation of information occurred in a recent updating of the website. Instead of a 'tab' dedicated to the theft appearing on

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<sup>495</sup> Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 'Sixteenth Anniversary of the Theft – Press Statement', March 17, 2006, Boston,

[http://www.gardnermuseum.org/press\\_releases/theft\\_16th\\_anniversary\\_press\\_statement.pdf](http://www.gardnermuseum.org/press_releases/theft_16th_anniversary_press_statement.pdf).

<sup>496</sup> Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 'Sixteenth Anniversary of the Theft – Press Statement', March 17, 2006, Boston,

[http://www.gardnermuseum.org/press\\_releases/theft\\_16th\\_anniversary\\_press\\_statement.pdf](http://www.gardnermuseum.org/press_releases/theft_16th_anniversary_press_statement.pdf).

the museum's home page, it is now slightly buried; reached by clicking on 'About', then 'Archives', then selecting 'Theft'<sup>497</sup> [Figs. 4.30 and 4.31]. This subtle change parallels the new direction that the Gardner Museum is taking; the theft, still unavoidably part of the Gardner's history and display, is being channelled into a chapter of the museum's narrative, no longer its main story.

### **The New Gardner Museum**

In the 2006 interview, Hawley admitted a question she frequently reflects upon is, 'How do we get past this being our main story?'<sup>498</sup> This question frames the central ideas discussed in this chapter about the museological implications of art theft on a fixed collection. It also reveals the museum's determination against being defined by the theft. As long as the empty frames hang on the wall and the historical display of the galleries remains intact, the space will continue to be dominated by the missing objects. Over the years, this led Hawley to pursue ways of rejuvenating the artistic and music programs at the museum that once played a role in Gardner's lifetime. The Tapestry Room was renovated to host a lively concert series and an artist-in-residence program was established, with a small contemporary exhibition space built into an annex on the ground floor.

While visitors in Gardner's lifetime totalled 2,000 per year, the museum now accommodates 200,000 annually. The pressure that this caused in terms of

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<sup>497</sup> The most current theft information appears here: <http://www.gardnermuseum.org/resources/theft>.

<sup>498</sup> Interview with Anne Hawley, Director of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, 25 August 2006.

programming and facility management on the historic building led the museum to embark upon a strategic planning process in 1999 that looked to the future of the museum and the preservation of the building and collection.<sup>499</sup> The bold decision to build an addition to the existing palace was taken in order to relieve pressure on the historic spaces.

Designed by Renzo Piano, the new building is connected by a glass-enclosed walkway and will provide approximately 70,000 square feet of additional space [Figs. 4.32, 4.33 and 4.34]. According to the museum, ‘the design of the new building sustains the mission of the Gardner Museum, linking Isabella Gardner’s historic legacy with contemporary culture by providing new spaces to learn and experience art, music, and horticulture’.<sup>500</sup> The new building also provides state-of-the-art conservation labs, exhibition preparation space, and expanded archival and collection storage as well as a new shop, café and ‘Living Room’ - a space where visitors can learn about the creative undertakings of the museum and Isabella Stewart Gardner’s creative legacy.

The sheer size and scale of the project may be the answer to Hawley’s question. The new extension allows for the sort of creative expansion that could not be accommodated by the original building. Although Gardner’s binding will had to be contested, her desire to ‘captivate the mind, elevate the senses and awaken the

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<sup>499</sup> Currently, the endowment is in a much healthier position as well, the original \$1.6 million (£1.03 million) at the time of Gardner’s death in 1924 has gradually increased to \$114.8 million (£74 million) as 31 March 2011. See ‘Museum Fact Sheet’, 12 May 2011. *Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum*. [Last accessed 8 July 2011]. [http://www.gardnermuseum.org/about/press/museum\\_press\\_kit](http://www.gardnermuseum.org/about/press/museum_press_kit).

<sup>500</sup> See ‘Building on a Legacy’, *Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum* [Last accessed 12 November 2011] <http://buildingproject.gardnermuseum.org/design/new-building>.

spirit of all who visited' remain unchallenged.<sup>501</sup> No longer an isolated entity both socially and geographically, the new and as yet unmarked and undefined space may just be enough to push the Gardner Museum out from beneath the shadow of the theft. While still maintaining the historic galleries, where the voids left by the theft remain a dominant presence, the new activity next door may offset some of the melancholic atmosphere. By not hiding the theft and incorporating it as a tragic yet significant part its history, the Gardner Museum is attempting to establish its image as a forward-looking civic arts institution.

### **Conclusion**

Where other collections have both the freedom and opportunity to replace or re-hang works at the site of the crime, the Gardner did not. Or rather, they chose not to. Instead, the empty frames hang on the wall, where they can either be read as a mourning gesture to something lost, or as 'place-savers' in the anticipation of the recovery of the stolen objects. Either way, the rooms in which the voids remain are marked by these distinctive features. The empty frames have brought a new narrative to a space that was dominated by the legacy of Gardner's personal taste. The condition of display that once prioritised atmosphere over individual components has been subverted by the theft. The removal of the objects from their fixed setting highlighted their individuality; this was something that the museum had previously

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<sup>501</sup> Hawley as quoted in 'Building on a Legacy', *Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum* [Last accessed 12 November 2011] <http://buildingproject.gardnermuseum.org/design/new-building>.

struggled to achieve. More is now known about these objects *because* they are absent.

Furthermore, the effects of increasingly high levels of security examined in the Louvre and Munch Museum case studies contrast the situation at the Gardner Museum which presents an example of what happens when the display is unaltered and the pictures remain unrecovered. The gaping voids left on the walls highlight the important relationship between object and space and the impact that theft has on site specificity within a fixed collection. It bears consideration that should the Gardner pictures be recovered, evidence from the previous case studies supports the idea that the museum will encounter great public interest in seeing the returned pictures as well as pressures to provide a display of increased security.

Perhaps the new extension to the museum would offer a temporary venue that allows for the kind of overt security monitoring that tends to follow the initial display of the recovered paintings. In the meantime, the museum would collect admission fees that could be put towards the inevitable security upgrades that would be required in the historical part of the museum. On the other hand, the length of time the pictures have been missing and the significance of their recovery would be so great that an effective public relations campaign might do enough in itself to match the financial burden of an upgrade (in the unlikely absence of government funding).

Of great interest will be whether the historical rooms are altered in any way following the return of the stolen objects. The previous case studies confirm that recovered objects receive special treatment. From Perspex glass cases to glass walls

and in the instance of the *Mona Lisa*, its own room, once returned these objects are never again displayed in the same way. This would be increasingly problematic at the Gardner Museum, where the display depends so much on the concept of a collection as a whole; not prioritising any particular object(s) over another. The implementation of overt security measures would have an instant impact on the condition of display, contradicting the informing principles of the collection. The museum did not alter the display of other significant (i.e. high value) works in the wake of the theft, such as Titian's *Rape of Europa*, or the smaller and more easily portable *Pietàs*, one by Raphael (c.1503-05) and another by Michelangelo (c.1538-44). This may indicate that the museum might be less inclined to put into practice the hierarchical security measures seen in the other examples in this thesis whereby only certain objects are selected for increased security.

The museum's wish to adhere as closely as possible to the terms of Gardner's will might also play a part in making that decision. The importance of protecting the newly recovered objects (collectively the most valuable to ever be stolen) may threaten the condition of display at the Gardner, the very thing setting it apart from other institutions. Furthermore, now that the collection is insured, another voice will contribute to the security decisions from a perspective that could directly contradict the terms of Gardner's will. Further contestation of the will may begin to dilute the museum's capacity to uphold Gardner's legacy and it could transpire that the return of the paintings, not their absence, presents the greater challenge to the Gardner Museum.



## Chapter 5: Conclusion



Entrance to Philip Johnson's subterranean art collection, New Canaan, Connecticut

'If we only thought about security then we would have to place the pictures in a vault.'<sup>502</sup>  
Lise Mjøs, Director of Municipal Art Collections, Oslo, 23 August 2004.

Through a series of examples, this thesis illustrated some of the perils and challenges experienced by museums when responding to art theft with particular attention to the spatial organisation of museums and the relationship of museums to their audiences. Various themes and problems have emerged across the study and the following cautionary observations can be presented.

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<sup>502</sup> 'Munch art theft stirs debate on museum security', *USA Today*. 23 August 2004. [www.usatoday.com/news/world/2004-08-23-scream-norway\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/world/2004-08-23-scream-norway_x.htm). Mjøs was appointed Director of the Munch Museum shortly after the re-opening of the museum in 2005 replacing previous director Gunnar Sørensen who took a personal leave following the theft.



### **Historical Tension within Museums**

There is a tension between accessibility and display that is historical and inherent to the operation of museums, but there is something about museum security that draws special attention to these processes. Nineteenth-century anxieties about the class, age, and gender of a museum visitor which created the perceived necessity for warders, rope barriers, and glazed pictures have now been replaced by discussions that centre on the potential for theft, vandalism, armed robbery, and terrorism.<sup>503</sup>

In the case of the Louvre, longstanding practices of selective admission criteria, warders invigilating galleries and the glazing of important pictures point towards an enduring concern for object safety predating the 1911 theft of the *Mona Lisa*, but even at the time these practices were not met without complaint. The examples of vandalism in 1907 of Poussin's *Le Déluge* and Ingres's *Pope Pius VII in the Sistine Chapel* illustrate the widespread (the articles cited in the Louvre chapter of this thesis were published in *The New York Times*) concern over the vulnerability of museum collections. Moreover, the abovementioned tension between accessibility and display was exemplified by the publication, less than a month later, of the

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<sup>503</sup> To reiterate, something like vandalism is not a new risk, but it seems that recent and well-publicised incidents must keep it at the forefront of security concerns (for example, the cup thrown at the *Mona Lisa* in 2009, the defacing of a Tate Modern Rothko in 2012, and a woman who wrote in indelible black marker on Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* at the Louvre-Lens museum in February 2013). Of particular note, the following sources helped establish a developed picture of nineteenth-century anxieties in the museum: Rees Leahy 2012 and Siegel 2008; for more contemporary concerns: Bazley 2010 and Gamboni 1997.

backlash over the decision to glaze important paintings.<sup>504</sup> These examples reinforce upon us that visitor experience is as important to the operation of the museum as it was 250 years ago.<sup>505</sup>

In the twentieth century, Isabella Stewart Gardner's concern for the safety of the objects in her collection permeated the design and function of the museum from the outset. Strict admission criteria and visiting hours, closely guarded blueprints and designs (to the extent of testing the music room's acoustics with blind school children), her insistence that future museum directors live on-site, and the placement of statues representing Saints George and Florian (the patron saints protecting believers from theft and fire) at the entrance of the museum represented her overprotectiveness of the collection that played out in its daily operations.

In Oslo, the initial design of the Munch Museum reflected a Cold War era concern for security which did not necessarily affect the arrangement of the museum with respect to the prevention of theft, vandalism or accidental damage, but it did mean that the plan of the museum included measures such as a bomb shelter and strategies to be implemented in the event of a national security threat.

### **Museological Responses to Threats are Varied**

Looking across the central examples of this study, it becomes pertinent to note that sometimes the measures installed in the name of object safety relate almost

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<sup>504</sup> See 'Girl Demolished Louvre Painting: Slashes Ingres's "Sistine Chapel" and Gives Herself Up to the Police', *The New York Times*, 13 September 1907, 'Louvre Vandal Sentenced: Woman Who Slashed Ingres Goes to Jail for Six Months', *The New York Times*, 4 October 1907, and "'Mona Lisa' Under Glass: Famous Picture in the Louvre Now Protected Against Vandals', *The New York Times*, 13 October 1907.

<sup>505</sup> Rees Leahy 2012.

as much to the potential for damage, accidental or otherwise, as they do to the prevention of theft. Whilst for reasons of scope and clarity this thesis centred its questions around the issue of theft (an event that articulated strategic changes or decisions in each case), many of the security measures mentioned and a visitor's experience of them can relate to this wider potential. For instance, the placement of Munch's paintings behind glass walls might now be a deterrent against theft as much as prevention of accidental damage, vandalism or terrorism. My point is that the cases were selected because a theft had occurred, which had an added element of complication resulting from the production of absence in the museum, and important decisions were taken as a result.

With this in mind, these examples should not be read as case studies that disclose general truths, but more as range of responses to fears about the security of a collection. As evidenced, these efforts at securing a collection can produce strong juxtapositions where it becomes tempting to read implied value judgments into the decisions a museum has taken, or how visitors might perceive these measures. For instance, at the Louvre and Munch Museum, security apparatus such as bullet-proof glass walls and oversized vitrines, rope barriers that accentuate the space around an already-enclosed object in a crowded room, and subjecting visitors to baggage searches and metal detectors upon entry and exit could be seen as a duplication of systems of power that prioritise notions of exclusivity and institutional hierarchies based upon value.

This study used the formidable security measures now installed at the Munch Museum and surrounding the *Mona Lisa* at the Louvre to question the forms of

hegemony within which these systems operate and to address resulting visual, spatial and theoretical concerns. It was found that security has the capacity to exclude, judge, repress and censor the ways in which the public accesses art. Of note, the security measures installed in these instances have the potential to force objects to function in increasing states of isolation. Orphaned by their display, the very selection and arrangement of objects in an exhibition and the visual presentation of security measures reinforce an awareness of the value of individual objects even whilst museums seek to align themselves with the rhetoric of accessibility.

In contrast, no obtrusive security measures were implemented at the Gardner Museum following the theft. As such, this case was informed by an analysis of the impact of the voids upon museum space and how the condition of display that once prioritised a general atmosphere over individual components was subverted by these overpowering voids. The response to the theft in this case suggested an expectation of self-regulating behaviour on behalf of the museum. Although the process occurred in different ways, the various responses to each theft created a new kind of viewing experience.

### **Armed Robbery**

One of the observations that emerged from this study is that perceived threats to collections find a parallel with fears in the wider global environment about issues of armed robbery or terrorism – topics that museums are under increased pressure to address. A quick reflection upon threats to museums reported in the news in the past few years indicates that armed robbery (as opposed to terrorism in the form of bomb

threats, etc.) is a growing concern and one that museums are rather helpless against. As well as the Munch Museum theft in 2004, other well documented examples include the robbery of the National Museum of Fine Art, Stockholm in December 2000 where three thieves ordered museum security guards to the floor at gunpoint and escaped with a Rembrandt and two Renoirs (since recovered). In February 2008, the Emile Bührle Foundation in Zurich was robbed at gunpoint and both visitors and staff were ordered to lie on the floor. Four paintings by Cézanne, Degas, Van Gogh and Monet were taken (two of the four have been recovered).

Museums are extremely vulnerable to armed robbery – regardless of the security they have in place, they still need to ensure staff and visitors are not placed in harm's way. However, often due to financial constraints, in many cases, armed thieves can just walk straight in from the street. This was one of the lessons learned at the Munch Museum and it bears consideration that the extent of the alterations made following the 2004 theft can be viewed as a direct response to armed robbery; holding the deterrence and prevention of another theft at its core. Keeping this in mind is one way of rationalising the presence of metal detectors, baggage scanners, locking entry and exit gates, as well as the additional layers of glazed paintings fixed to the walls behind large sheets of bulletproof glass. Where the case study concentrated on the loss of display space and this obtrusive separation, these measures allowed the museum to reopen to the public whilst mitigating against more than one risk simultaneously, meeting standards imposed by security and insurance professionals, and attempt to continue on with their original curatorial remit and

programmes. This same logic – excessive measures employed due to exceptional circumstances – could be applied to the example of the *Mona Lisa* as well.

### **New Security Aesthetic**

It was suggested in the thesis that some of the physical changes made to the Louvre and Munch Museum post theft could be seen as producing a discernible new security aesthetic in museums because of the repeated use of certain features, such as glass walls and large scale bullet proof casings. Supporting evidence came from the Rijksmuseum at Schiphol Airport and the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto, where there was an association with the installation of upgraded security measures and an increase in the separation of viewer and object. Though not to suggest the emergence of a general aesthetic, it was suggested that it is beginning to appear in certain, isolated cases. However, due to the amount of further investigation required to support this statement, it should be cautiously considered at this point.

Though it may be the case that many of the features common to enhanced security prevent engagement (direct or partial) with the materiality of an object, within the context of this lengthy discussion about the vulnerability of collections it is also important to consider the positive and necessary aspects of a separation between object and viewer. In terms of museum security – public access and/or engagement means risk. Putting an object behind glass, delineating more space by a rope barrier, employing crowd control measures, and concentrating efforts on preventing anything that could be used as a weapon to cause injury to object or person being carried into a museum all serve to protect and conserve a collection – a

priority of any museum. What this thesis hopes to convey is while of course that priority must remain, there are consequences to the decisions that are made along the way and these have the potential to form a very interesting part of museological discourse.

### **Going Forward**

As the survey indicated at the beginning of this thesis, this appears to be the first compilation of a literature review for both the field of museum security as well as art theft. While this is a step in the right direction, it goes a long way in explaining the frequently encountered lack of intersection between these topics. Some points to consider moving forward from this study include addressing the marked absence of a history of museum security. Though this thesis assembles a general idea of the trends and changing location of museum security, further work in the field would contribute significantly to a deeper understanding of these features and fixtures found commonly in museums. Not only would this enhance existing bodies of work on the history of collecting and display, but it could make better connections with the more established discourses of value and crime within museological and art historical contexts. The scope for such an investigation is unlimited due to the trans-historical and trans-cultural nature of security.

Also, this investigation discovered that studies on the profiling of art thieves and their motivations, something frequently pondered about in art theft discourses, already exists within the field of criminology.<sup>506</sup> Whilst this information is more

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<sup>506</sup> Mackenzie 2005, 353-370.

directly applicable to law enforcement and recovery specialists than museologists, the exposure of curators and art historians to criminological discourses would go a long way to dispel many of the myths surrounding the objects central to their professions which are widely perpetuated by media and popular culture.

Furthermore, the lack of a centralised database for the collection and analysis of theft statistics prevents an accurate quantification of the problem. Not to cast a shadow over the constructive efforts to mitigate this obstacle, but as long as reporting remains voluntary and leading databases (such as the Art Loss Register) charge a fee for its services, it remains unlikely that a concrete measurement can ever be achieved. However, as outlined in the beginning of this study, we can remain satisfied that there is a perceptible increase in art theft which poses a direct threat to our cultural institutions and perhaps for now this is sufficient to generate interest in the continued expansion of the field.





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## Illustrations

### Chapter 1: Introduction



Fig. 1.1 Mrs. Vanderbilt's bedroom, Vanderbilt Mansion, Hyde Park, New York.



Fig. 1.2 Exhibition photograph of *The Book of Kells: Treasures of Trinity College Dublin*, Royal Academy, London, 1961.

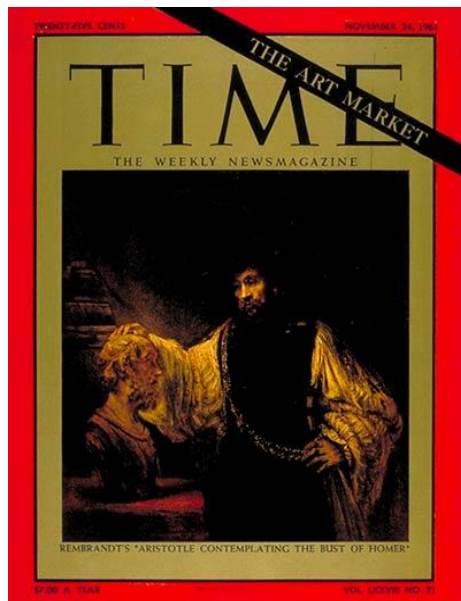
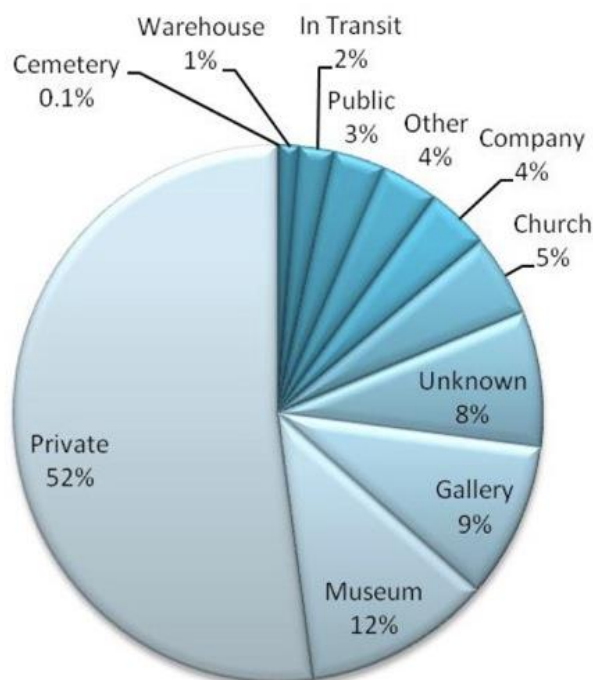


Fig.1.3 Cover of *Time Magazine*, 24 November 1961. The cover story was the Metropolitan Museum of Art's purchase of Rembrandt's *Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer*, 1653.

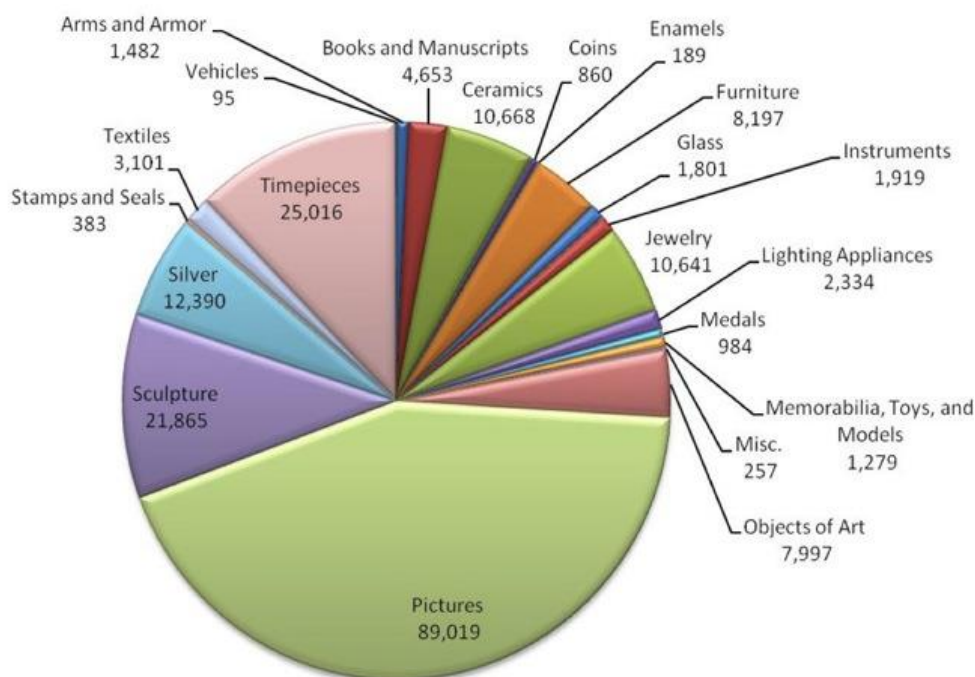


Fig. 1.4 Visitors during the 34 hour-long viewing of *Monet in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century* exhibition, Royal Academy, London, April 1999.



### Thefts by Location as reported to the ALR

Fig. 1.5 A table produced by the Art Loss Register organising reported thefts by location as of 2008. Maneker, Marion. 23 April 2009. 'Art Loss Register Data Dump', *Art Market Monitor*. <http://artmarketmonitor.com/2009/04/23/art-loss-register-data-dump>.



### Items Registered on ALR Database by Category

Fig. 1.6 A table produced by the Art Loss Register illustrating items listed on its database by category as of 2008. Maneker, Marion. 23 April 2009. 'Art Loss Register Data Dump', *Art Market Monitor*. <http://artmarketmonitor.com/2009/04/23/art-loss-register-data-dump>.



## Chapter 2: Louvre, Paris



Fig. 2.1 Louis Béroud, *Mona Lisa au Louvre*, 1911.

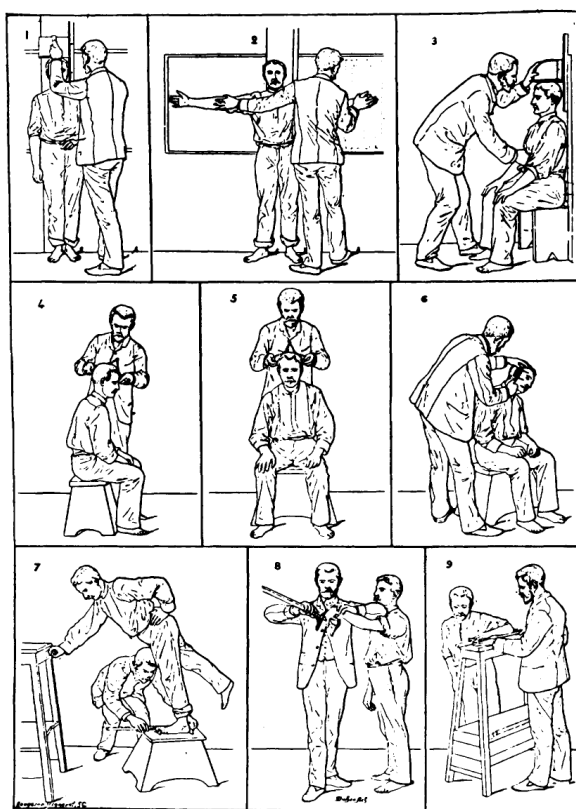


Fig. 2.2 Empty Space on wall in the Salon Carré, Louvre, Paris. Published in *L'Illustration*, 2 September 1911.



Fig. 2.3 Crowds gathering at the Louvre, *L'Intransigeant*, 24 August 1911.

RELEVÉ  
DU  
SIGNALEMENT ANTHROPOMÉTRIQUE



1. Taille. — 2. Envergure. — 3. Buste. —  
4. Longueur de la tête. — 5. Largeur de la tête. — 6. Oreille droite. —  
7. Pied gauche. — 8. Médius gauche. — 9. Coudée gauche.

Fig. 2.4 Frontispiece to Alphonse Bertillon. 1893. *Identification anthropométrique* (Melun, Imprimerie Administrative).



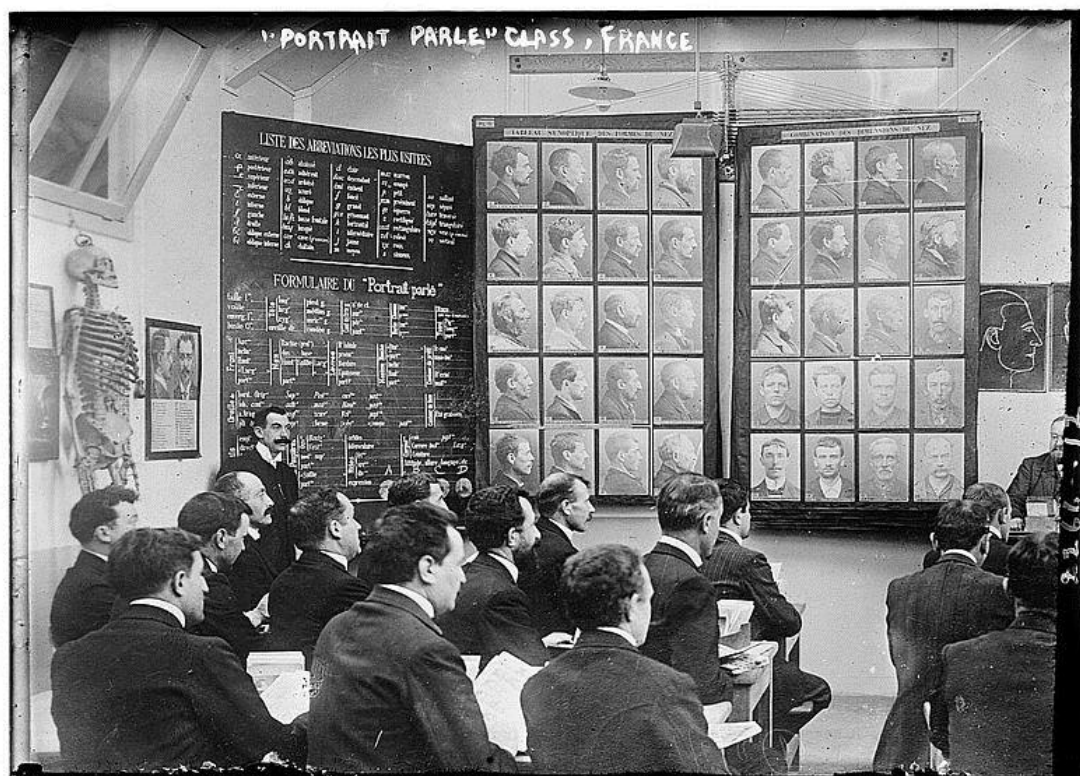


Fig. 2.5 Photograph of a class on the Bertillon method of criminal identification, 'Speaking Portraits', 1911.



Fig. 2.6 Image of the Salon Carré published in *Le Petit Parisien*, 23 August 1911. A white 'x' is marked under the *Mona Lisa*.



Fig. 2.7 Postcard of the Salon Carré, Louvre, c.1910. The *Mona Lisa* hangs under Veronese's *Feast in the House of Simon* and between Titian's *Allegory of Alfonso d'Avalos* (left) and Correggio's *Mystical Marriage of Saint Catherine with Saint Sebastian* (right).

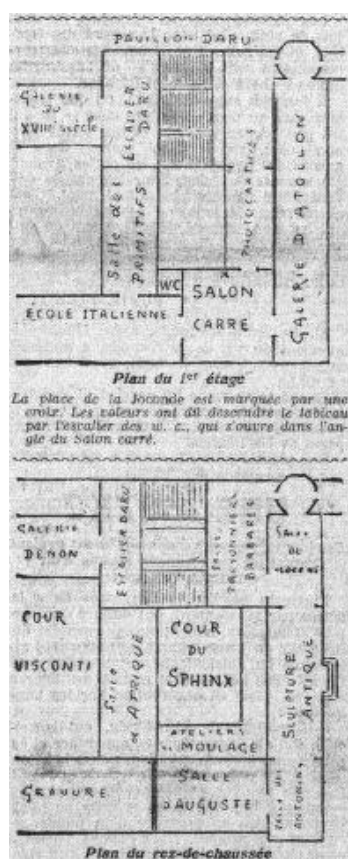


Fig. 2.8 Crudely-drawn floor plan of the Louvre published in *Le Petit Parisien*, 23 August 1911. The place of the *Mona Lisa* is marked with an 'x' in the Salon Carré.

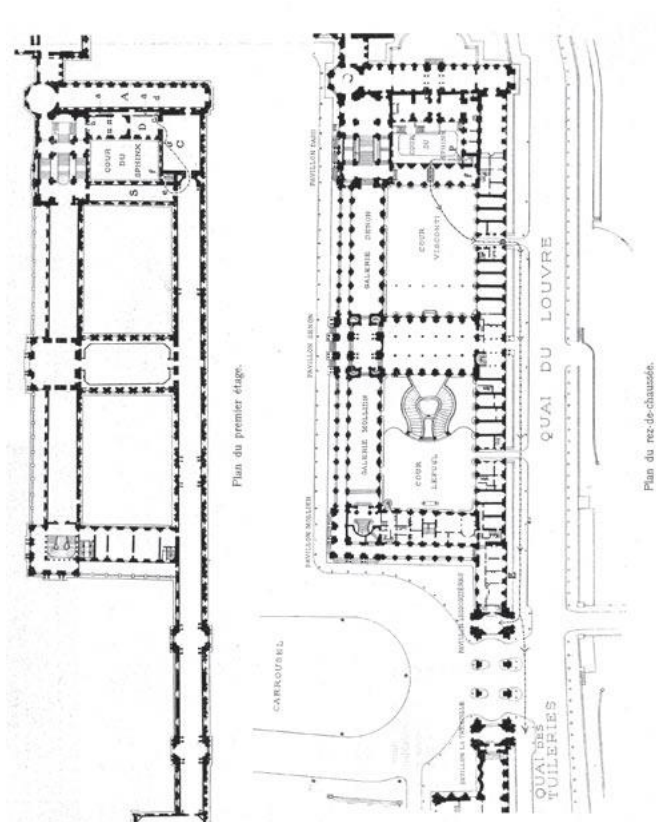


Fig. 2.9 Presumed escape route of the thief published in *L'Illustration*, 2 September 1911.



Fig. 2.10 Cover page, 'The Apaches are the plague of Paris', *Le Petit Journal*, 20 October 1907.

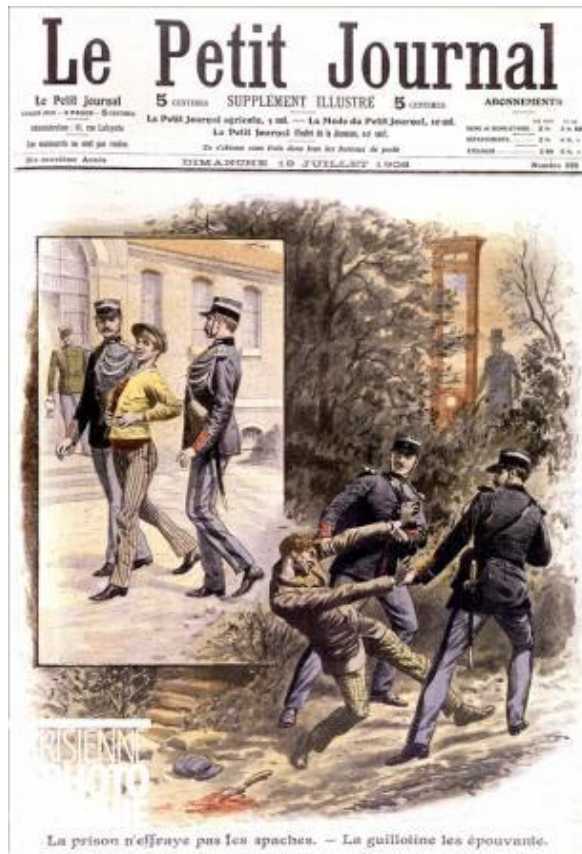


Fig. 2.11 Cover page, 'Prison does not scare the Apaches', *Le Petit Journal*, 19 July 1908.

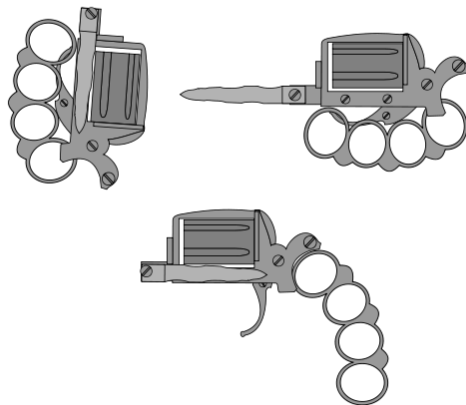


Fig. 2.12 An 'Apache revolver' (multipurpose pin fire revolver) manufactured by L. Dolne à Liege, 1869.





Fig. 2.13 Reconstruction of the *coup du père François*, published in a French self-defence manual, c.1900.



Fig. 2.14 Nicolas Poussin, *L'Hiver or Le Déluge*, 1660-1664, Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 2.15 Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Pope Pius VII in the Sistine Chapel*, 1814. Now in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



Fig. 2.16 François-Auguste Biard, *Closing Time*, 1847.



Fig. 2.17 The exhibition of the empty space at the Louvre. Published in *Le Petit Parisien*, 30 August 1911.



Fig. 2.18 Guillaume Apollinaire arrested for the theft of the *Mona Lisa*; handcuffed and escorted by a policeman, 1911.





Fig. 2.19 Louvre guard dogs, Jack and Milord, published in *Le Petit Parisien*, 18 September 1911.



Fig. 2.20 François-Auguste Biard, *Four o'clock at the Salon*, 1847.





Fig. 2.21 Studio of Jacques Louis David, *Portrait of Old Fuzelier, Attendant at the Louvre*, c.1805, Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 2.22 Louis Bérard, *A Guard at the Louvre*, 1912.




Fig. 2.23 Croumolle receiving telegram with news of the theft, film still from *Nick Winter et le vol de la Joconde*, screened at the Omnia Pathé, Paris, 1911. Directed by Paul Garbagni and Gérard Bourgeois.



Fig. 2.24 Thief returning the *Mona Lisa*, film still from *Nick Winter et le vol de la Joconde*, screened at the Omnia Pathé, Paris, 1911. Directed by Paul Garbagni and Gérard Bourgeois.

**La "JOCONDE" en vadrouille**

CHANSON D'ACTUALITE  
Sur l'air de "Après de ma Blonde"



Paroles d'Antonin LOUIS

**LA "JOCONDE" EN VADROUILLE**  
Chanson d'Antonin LOUIS, sur l'air "Après de ma blonde"

La Joconde "Joconde" d'Leonard de Vinci... Court à travers le monde...  
- Je n'en plus... à dis-pars de la terre Un don d'œuvre ma-les!... Part qu'en la de...  
- des... Ah! sacré, sacré malin! Est-ce qu'elle est à Douvres? New-York ou Pékin?

— 1 —  
La fameuse « Joconde »  
D'« Léonard de Vinci »  
Court à travers le monde,  
Elle n'est plus là,  
A disparu du Louvre  
Un d'ces derniers matins!  
Faut qu'on la découvre,  
Ah! sacré, sacré malin!  
Est-ce qu'elle est à Douvres?  
New-York ou Pékin?

— 2 —  
Elle avait le sourire,  
Et faisait des bégueins;  
Elle avait l'air de dire:  
Se me charger pas d'ennuis;  
Voilà qu'elle se décline  
Et jure la Dalila...  
Belle Florentine,  
Ah! « Mona » « Mona » « Lisa »  
C'est pas bico, roquigne,  
De nous planter là.

— 3 —  
Cette Sainte-Nitouche  
Avec ses grands beaux yeux,  
Sa provocante bouche  
Faisait rêver des cœurs,  
Ses dis: plus de manières!  
D'aimer, j'en veux, j'en veux;  
Je suis lassé de plaire  
A beaucoup d'journes et vieux,  
Je me fais la paire...  
J'veux faire un heureux.

— 4 —  
Est-elle à la montagne?  
Sera-t-elle aux bords d'un mer?  
Quel trouble l'accompagne  
Dans son p'tit trou pas cher?  
Existe-t-elle en aéroplane  
« Mona » « Mona » « Lisa »  
Et bravi la panne!  
La bonne aventure, à gus!  
Avec un mouf...  
Du salon, carrez?

— 5 —  
C'est inimaginable!  
Quel est l'auteur du coup?  
Sera-t-il inévitable,  
Voleur, romancier ou fou?  
Quoiqu'il en soit, chof' clair,  
Voilà que maintenant  
On parle moins d'putter,  
De Marquises et d'Alphonse...  
Mais, que drôle d'affaire!  
Ça, c'est épatant.

— 6 —  
La moral' de l'histoire:  
Not' l'air' peintre à l'eau,  
Comme à l'huile, c'est notoire,  
Faut la mettre sous l'oiseau;  
Des veugnes sans scrupule,  
De délicats Prussiens...  
Avec nos pendules  
L'importerons, non d'un chifon!  
Par cet canicale  
Roupillot les gardiens...

Édition Musicale Française : J. Fauch. Peissonnière (au bout du passage, maison du Paul de la), PARIS  
15. 8. 1911.

Fig. 2.25 Sheet music by Antonin Louis for 'La "Joconde" en vadrouille' ('Mona Lisa on a spree'), c.1911.

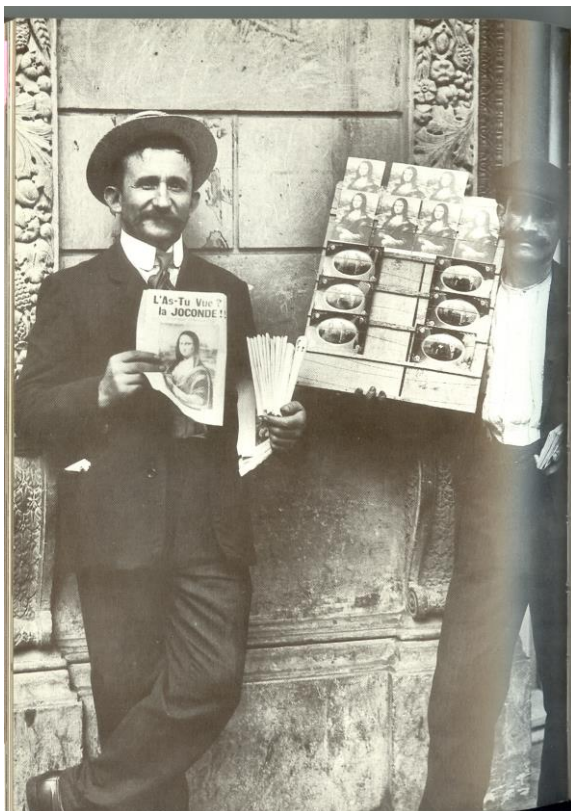


Fig. 2.26 A street singer selling copies of 'L'As-Tu Vue? La Joconde!!' and a man selling *Mona Lisa* postcards, 1911.





Fig. 2.27 Street Vendors in Paris, selling postcards of the *Mona Lisa*, c.1911.

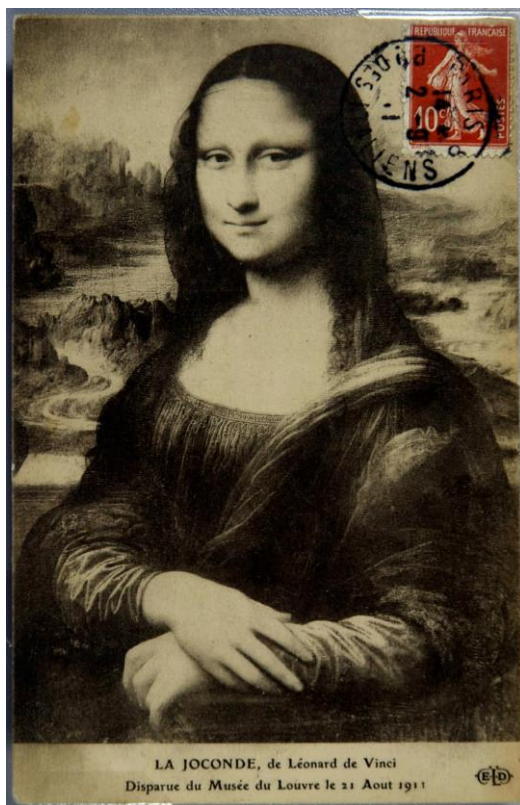


Fig. 2.28 Postcard of the *Mona Lisa*, c.1911, with caption marking its disappearance from the Louvre on 21 August 1911.

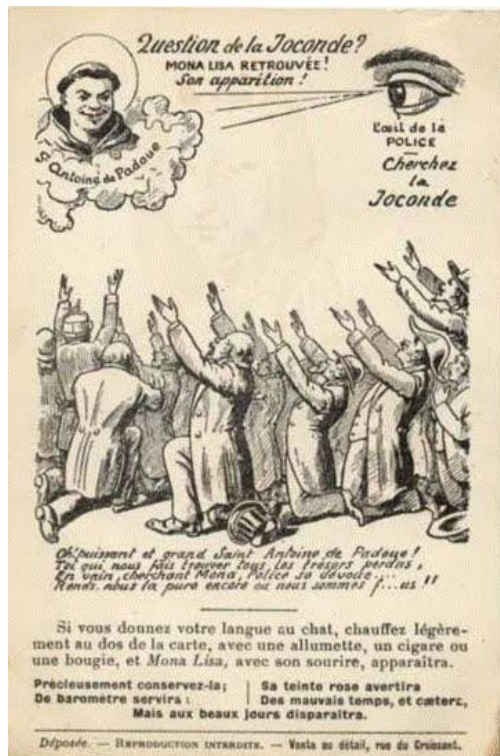


Fig. 2.29 Postcard of the *Mona Lisa* (who appears when postcard is held against the heat of a flame) with St. Anthony, 1911.

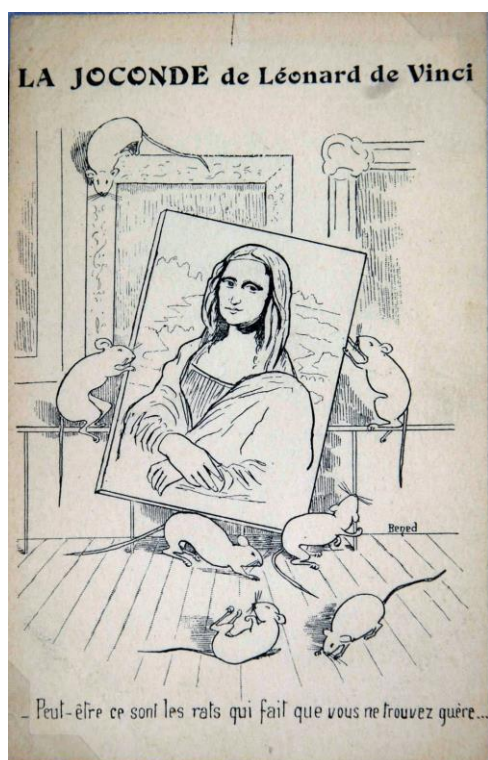


Fig. 2.30 Postcard of the *Mona Lisa* ('Maybe the rats took her'), 1911.





Fig. 2.31 Postcard of the *Mona Lisa* thumbing her nose, c. 1911.

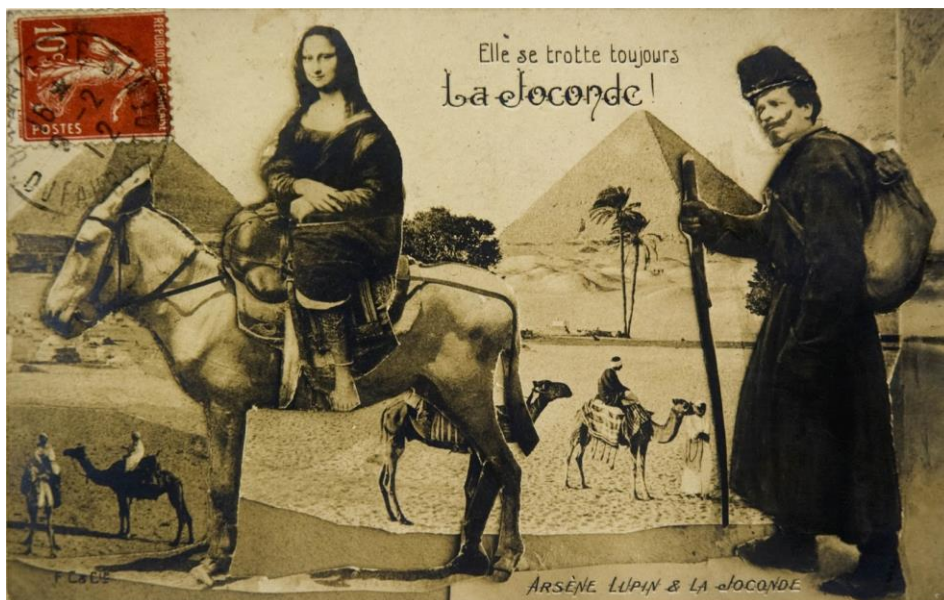


Fig. 2.32 Postcard of the *Mona Lisa* in Egypt with Arsène Lupin, c.1912.



Fig. 2.33 Postcard of the *Mona Lisa* in London, c.1912.



Fig. 2.34 Postcard of the *Mona Lisa* on the Tour de France, c.1912.

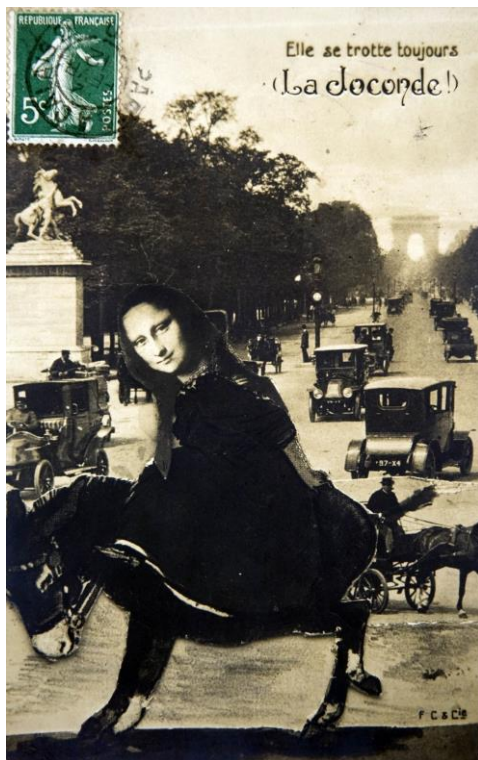


Fig. 2.35 Postcard of the *Mona Lisa* on a donkey in Paris, c.1912.



Fig. 2.36 Gino Starace, cover for the first volume of *Fantômas*, 1911. (Collection: Société des Amis de Fantômas, Paris)





Fig. 2.37 Juan Gris, *Fantômas (Pipe and Newspaper)*, 1915, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

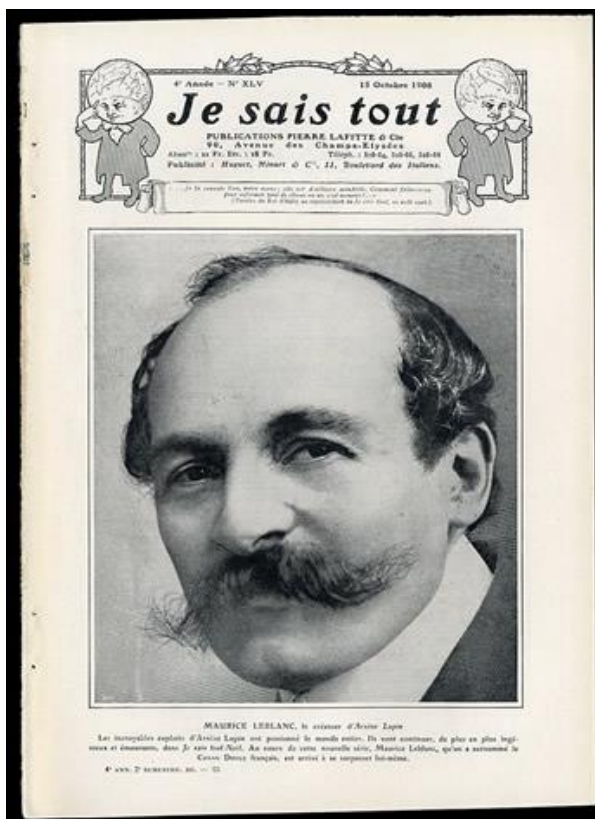


Fig. 2.38 Portrait of Maurice Leblanc in *Je Sais Tout*, 15 October 1908.

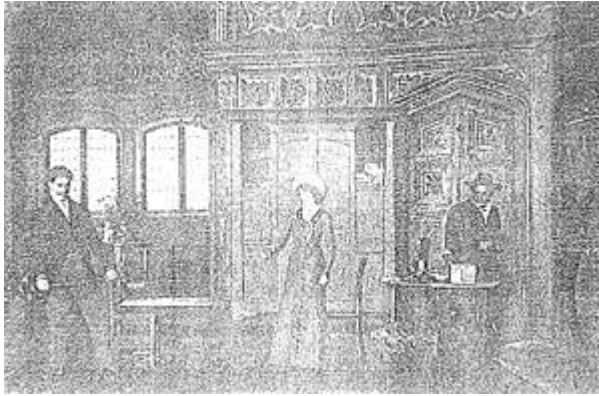


Fig. 2.39 Sketch of *Arsène Lupin*, directed Francis de Croisset and Maurice Leblanc. Four-act play first performed on October 28, 1908, at the Athénée in Paris.



Fig. 2.40 *Arsène Lupin* (film), 1932, directed by Jack Conway, released by Merto-Goldwyn-Mayer, 84 min.



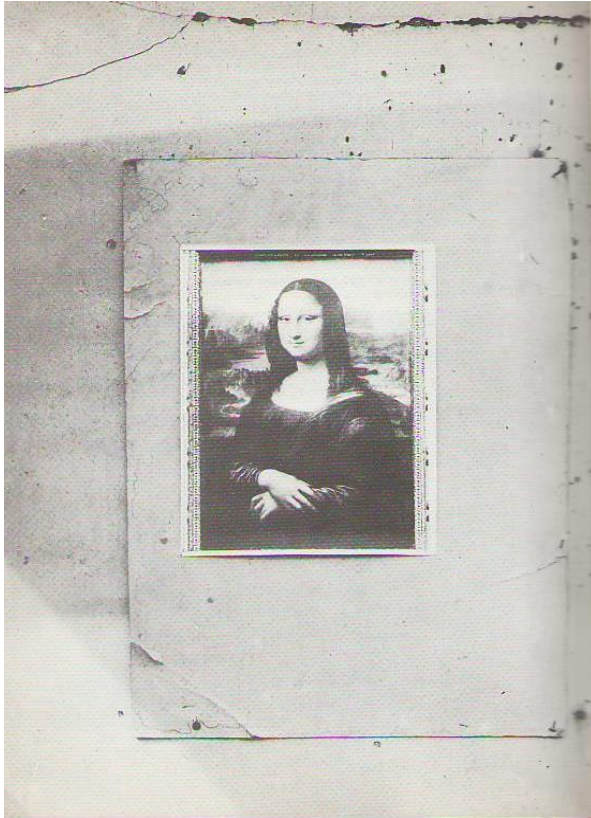


Fig. 2.41. Reproduction of the *Mona Lisa* hung in the empty space.



Fig. 2.42 *Carnaval de Nice* : char "Au revoir par la Joconde", 11 February 1912.



Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Fig. 2.43 *Carnaval de Nice, les bandits de Pégomas emportant la Joconde*, 11 February 1912.



Fig. 2.44 Raffaello Santi (Raphael), *Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione*, c. 1514-15, Louvre, Paris.





Fig. 2.45 Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, *La Femme à la perle*, 1842. Louvre, Paris.



Fig. 2.46 Hubert Robert, *Design for the Grande Galerie in the Louvre*, 1796. Musée Louvre, Paris.





Fig. 2.47 Samuel F.B. Morse, *The Gallery of the Louvre*, 1833, Musée américain, Giverny.



Fig. 2.48 Giuseppe Castiglione, *Vue du Salon Carré au Musée du Louvre*, 1861.



Fig. 2.49 Louis Béroud, *Portrait of Frédéric La Guillerme, engraving the Mona Lisa*, 1909.



Fig. 2.50 The *Mona Lisa* at the Uffizi, Florence, December 1913. Museum director Giovanni Poggi (right) inspects the painting.





Fig. 2.51 The *Mona Lisa* on display at the Uffizi, Florence, 14 – 19 December 1913.



Fig. 2.52 Crowds outside the Borghese Gallery, Rome, December 1913.





Fig. 2.53 Yves Polli, Postcard marking the arrival of the *Mona Lisa* in Milan, 1913-14.

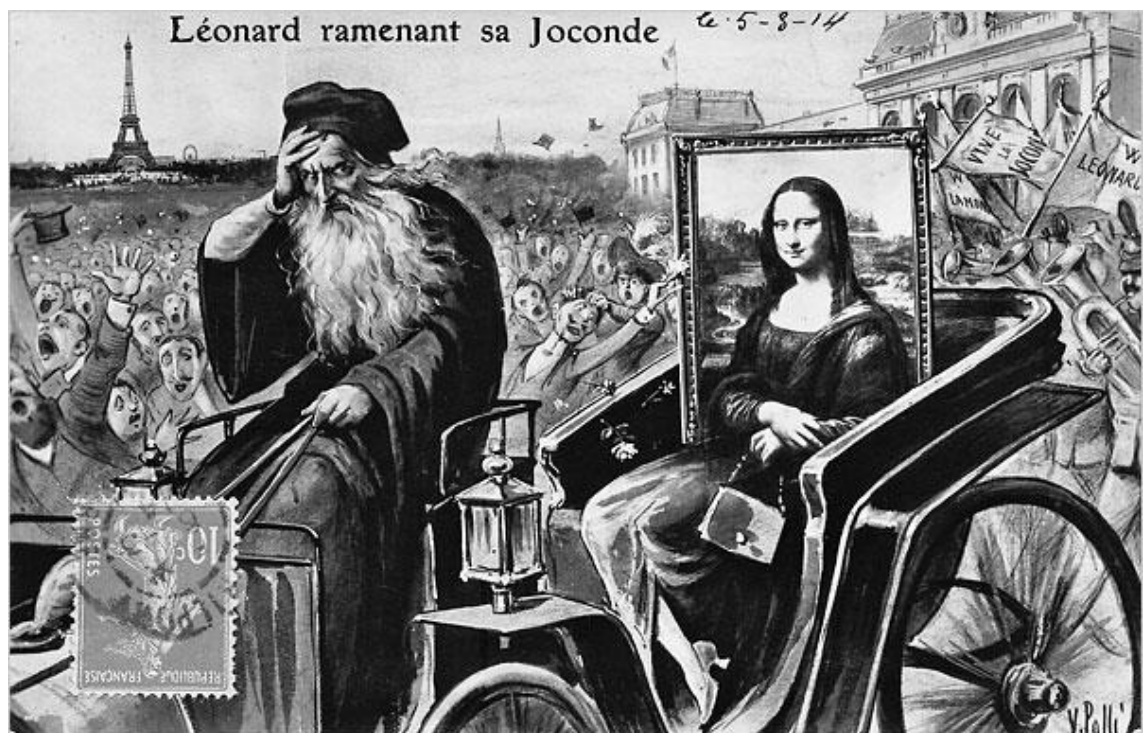


Fig. 2.54 Yves Polli, Postcard of the *Mona Lisa* being driven by Leonardo back to Paris, 1913-14.



Fig. 2.55 The *Mona Lisa* on display at the École des Beaux Arts, Paris, 31 December 1913 to 3 January 1914. Photograph published in “*La Joconde*” a réintégré son domicile légal’, *Le Petit Parisien*, 4 January 1914.



Fig. 2.56 Special entrance for visitors to see the *Mona Lisa* in January 1914, Louvre, Paris. Photograph published in ‘Au Louvre, les Parisiens ont defilé devant la “Joconde”’, *Le Petit Parisien*, 5 January 1914.



Fig. 2.57 Above: *Mona Lisa* at the Salon Carré, Louvre (pre-theft photograph). Below: a diagram of the Salon Carré, showing the flow of traffic between the two barriers erected for the exhibition following its recovery. Photograph and diagram published in 'La "Joconde" a réintégré son domicile légal', *Le Petit Parisien*, 4 January 1914.



Fig. 2.58 William Nicholson, *The Return of the Mona Lisa*, 1914. Private Collection.



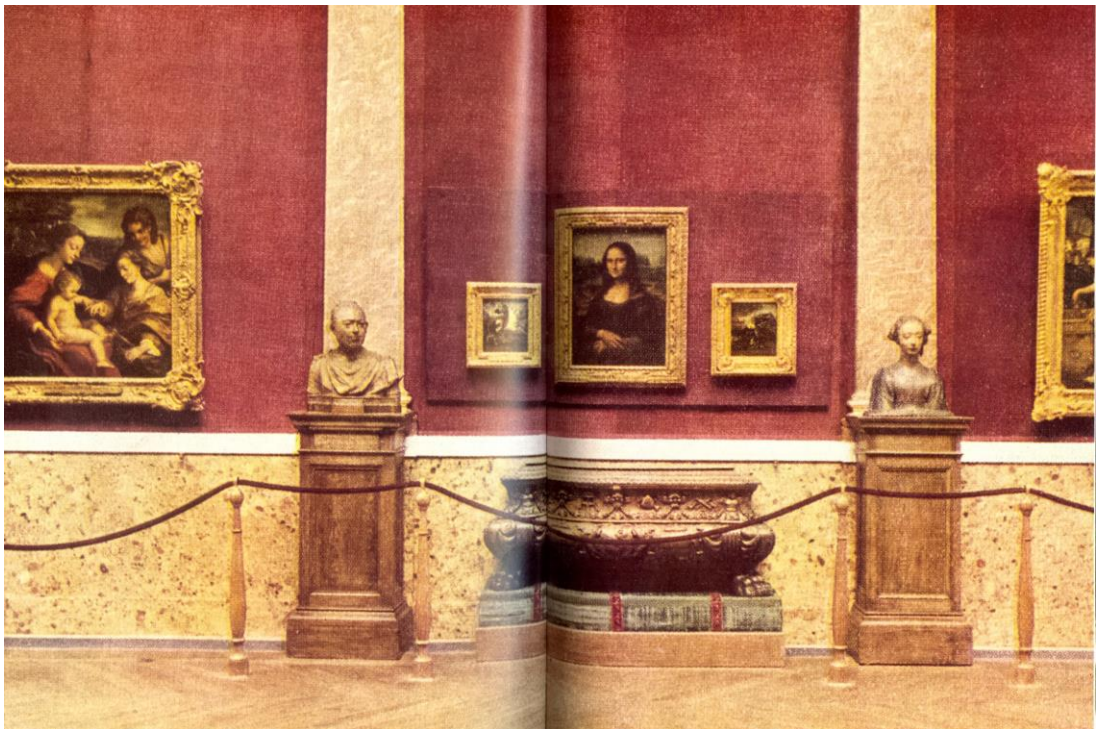


Fig. 2.59 *Mona Lisa* at the Louvre, 1929.



Fig. 2.60 Return of the *Mona Lisa* to the Louvre after the war. Paris, 1945



Fig. 2.61 *Mona Lisa* hanging in the Louvre. Photographed by Dmitri Kessel, *LIFE*, 1950.



Fig. 2.62 Faith Ringgold, *Dancing at the Louvre*, 1991. Acrylic on canvas, tie-dyed, pieced fabric border, 73.5 x 80 inches. From the series *The French Collection Part I*; Number 1. Private Collection.



Fig. 2.63 The crated *Mona Lisa* in the stateroom of the SS *France*, en route to New York, December 1962.



Fig. 2.64 The transfer of the *Mona Lisa* from the SS *France* to a security van in New York Harbor at Pier 88 under the watch of New York City police officers, December 19, 1962.





Fig. 2.65 Members of the press viewing the *Mona Lisa* in the vault of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



Fig. 2.66 Posing with the *Mona Lisa* at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. L-R: President John F. Kennedy, Madame Marie-Madeleine Lioux (wife of André Malraux), French Culture Minister André Malraux, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, and Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson.



Fig. 2.67 The *Mona Lisa*, behind glass, guarded by two U.S. Marine Corps guards with fixed bayonets at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., January 1963.



Fig. 2.68 Children viewing the *Mona Lisa* at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., January 14, 1963.





Fig. 2.69 Visitors queuing to see the *Mona Lisa* at the National Gallery, Washington, D.C., 13 January 1963.



Fig. 2.70 Queue for the *Mona Lisa* exhibition stretching down Fifth Avenue at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Fig. 2.71 Visitors view the *Mona Lisa* in the Medieval Sculpture Hall at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.



Fig. 2.72 Souvenirs of the *Mona Lisa*'s exhibition in Tokyo, 1974.



Fig. 2.73 *Mona Lisa* as a consumer icon. Tokyo, 1974.



Fig. 2.74 Exhibition of the *Mona Lisa* at the Tokyo National Museum, 17 April to 11 June 1974.



Fig. 2.75 Exhibition of the *Mona Lisa* at the Tokyo National Museum, 17 April to 11 June 1974.



Fig. 2.76 *The Pavilion of the Vatican*, New York World's Fair, Flushing Meadows, Queens, New York, Manhattan Postcard Company, Chrome, 9 x 14cm.



Fig. 2.77 Three-tiered moving sidewalk at the Vatican Pavilion, World's Fair, New York, 1964.



Fig. 2.78 The *Mona Lisa* was transferred to the Salle Rosa while the Salle des États was refurbished from 2001-2005.





Fig. 2.79 The specially-constructed enclosure of the *Mona Lisa* in the Salle des États, until 2001.



Fig. 2.80 Another view of the *Mona Lisa* in the Salle des États, 1998. Note Raphael's portrait of *Baldassare Castiglione* at the bottom left and Correggio's *Mystic Marriage of St Catherine* on the lower right hand side of the photograph.



Fig. 2.81 The *Mona Lisa* in the Salle des États, 2005.



Fig. 2.82 The freestanding wall of the *Mona Lisa* in the Salle des États, 2005.



Fig. 2.83 Veronese's *The Wedding Feast at Cana* in the Salle des États, 2005. This painting faces the *Mona Lisa* at the opposite end of the gallery.



Fig. 2.84 The tensabarrier set beyond Piqueras's fixed wooden railing in the Salle des États.





Fig. 2.85 A sense of the distance between the tensabarrier and the fixed railing in the Salle des États.



Fig. 2.86 Overcrowding before the *Mona Lisa* in the Salle des États.



Fig. 2.87 Disabled access between the barriers to view the *Mona Lisa*.



Fig. 2.88 A spotlight is integrated into the shelf under the *Mona Lisa*.





Fig. 2.89 New roof lighting in stalled in the Salle des États, 2005.

### Chapter 3: Munch Museum, Oslo

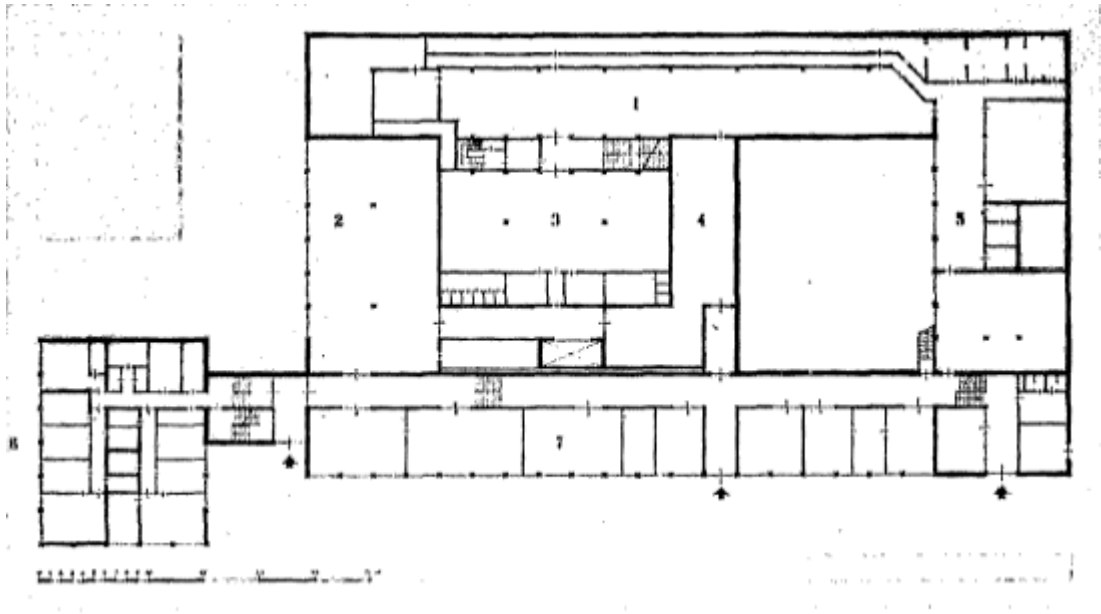


Fig. 3.1 Basement floor plan of the Munch Museum, Oslo, 1963. Plan numbering: 1. Store; 2. Storeroom for paintings; 3. Cloakroom; 4. Bomb shelter; 5. Technical section; 6. Custodians' quarters; 7. Conservation section.

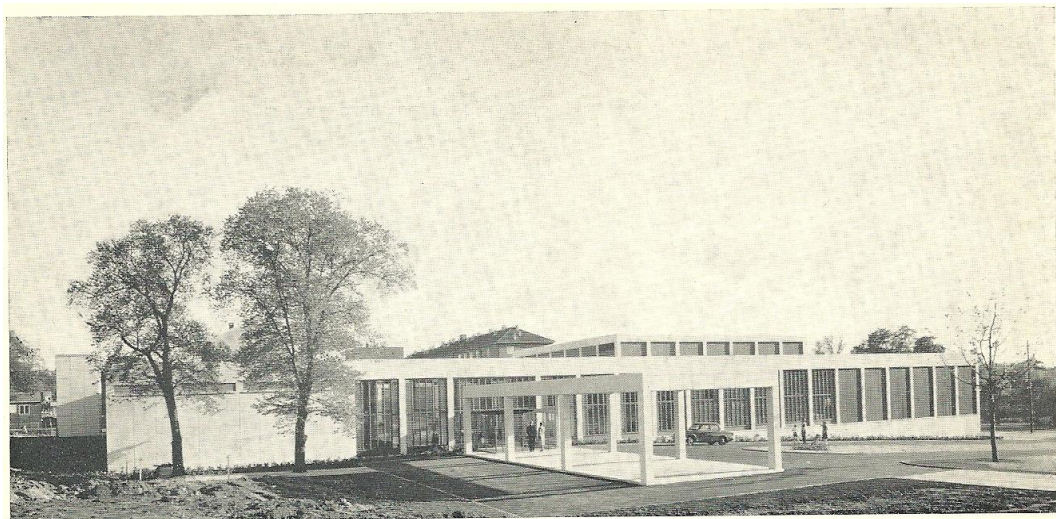


Fig. 3.2 Main Entrance, North Façade of the Munch Museum, Oslo, 1963. A small car is parked on the ring road to the right of the main entrance.

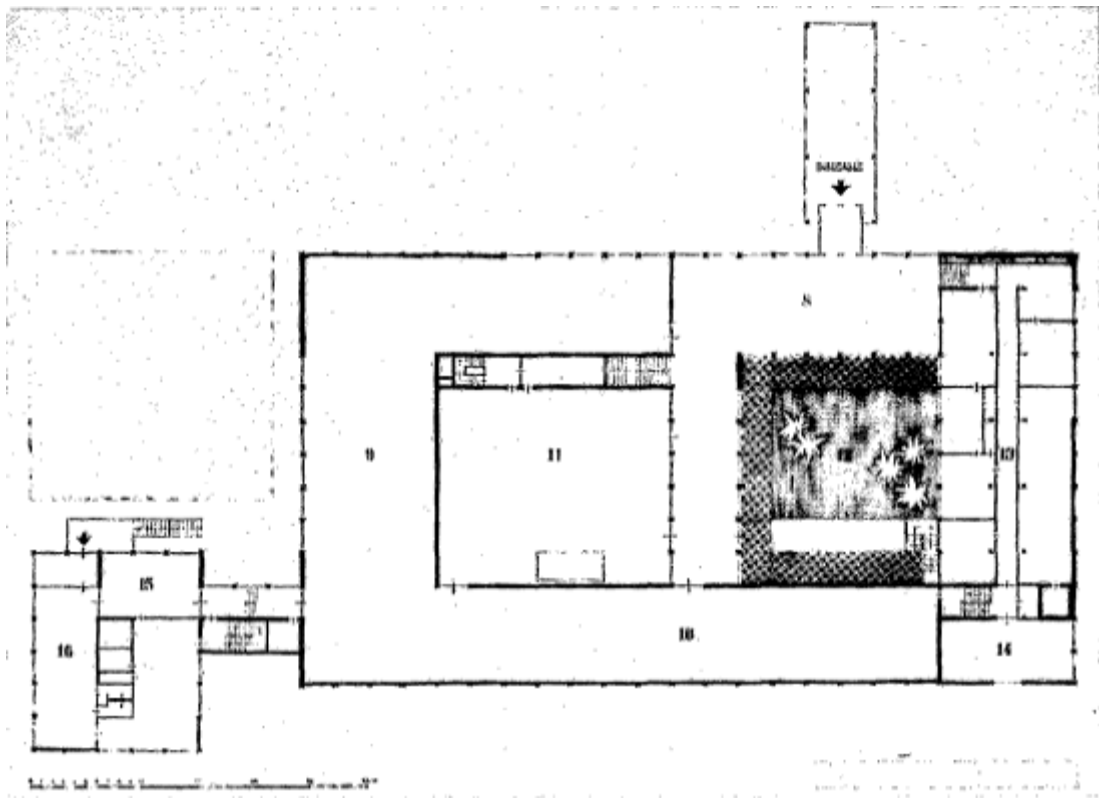


Fig. 3.3 Ground floor plan of the Munch Museum, Oslo, 1963. Plan numbering: 8. Hall; 9. Exhibition of paintings; 10. Exhibition of prints; 11. Lecture room and temporary exhibitions; 12. Garden patio; 13. Administrative offices; 14. Library; 15. Restroom; 16. Restaurant.

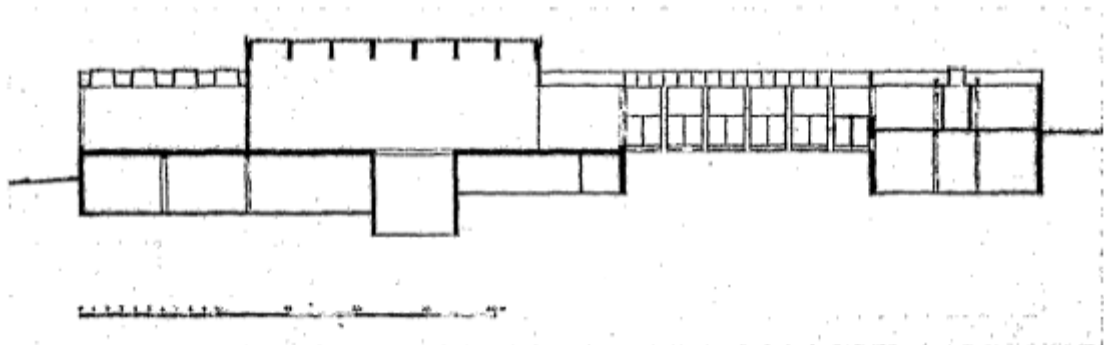


Fig. 3.4 Cross-section plan of the Munch Museum, Oslo, 1963.

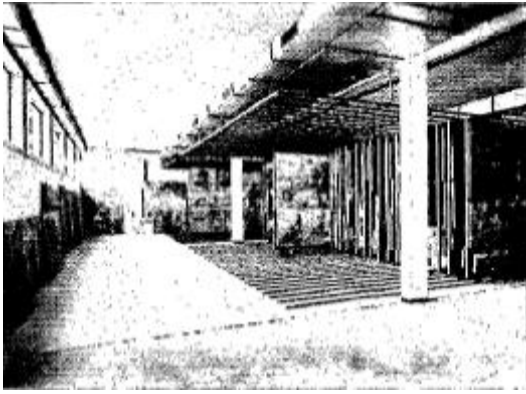


Fig. 3.5 Storeroom for paintings, Munch Museum, Oslo, 1963.



Fig. 3.6 Storeroom for prints and drawings, Munch Museum, Oslo, 1963.





Fig. 3.7 Exhibitions rooms, Munch Museum, Oslo, 1963. Entrance to the restroom and restaurant from the exhibition section. Note the partition wall to the left of the doors. The restaurant closed in 1994 when the new café was built next to the main entrance. In 2004, this exit was sealed.

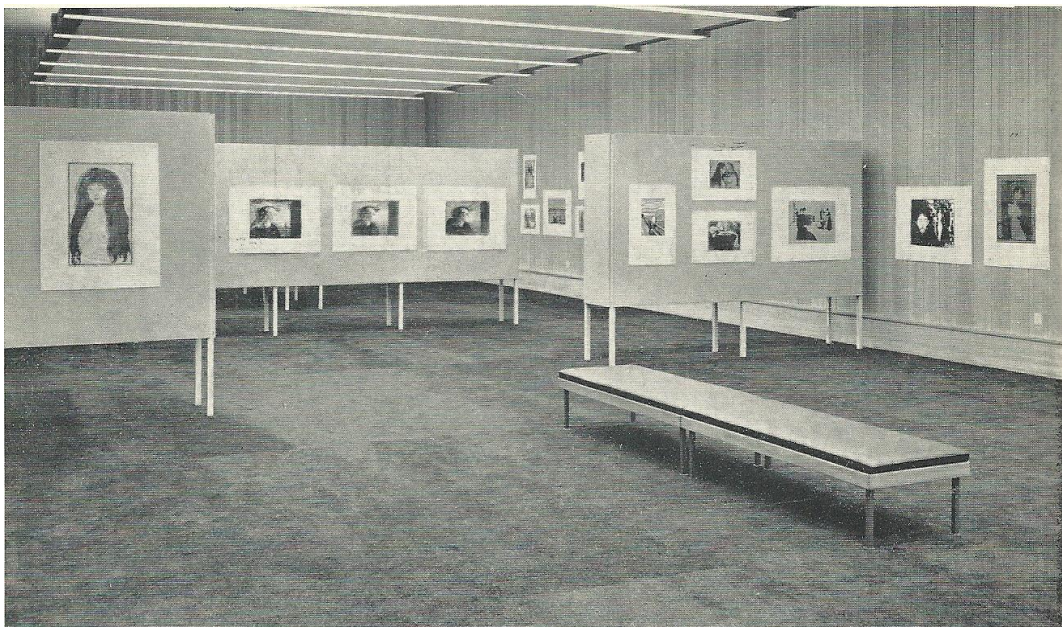


Fig. 3.8 Exhibition of prints and drawings, Munch Museum, Oslo, 1963. Different style of partition walls employed.



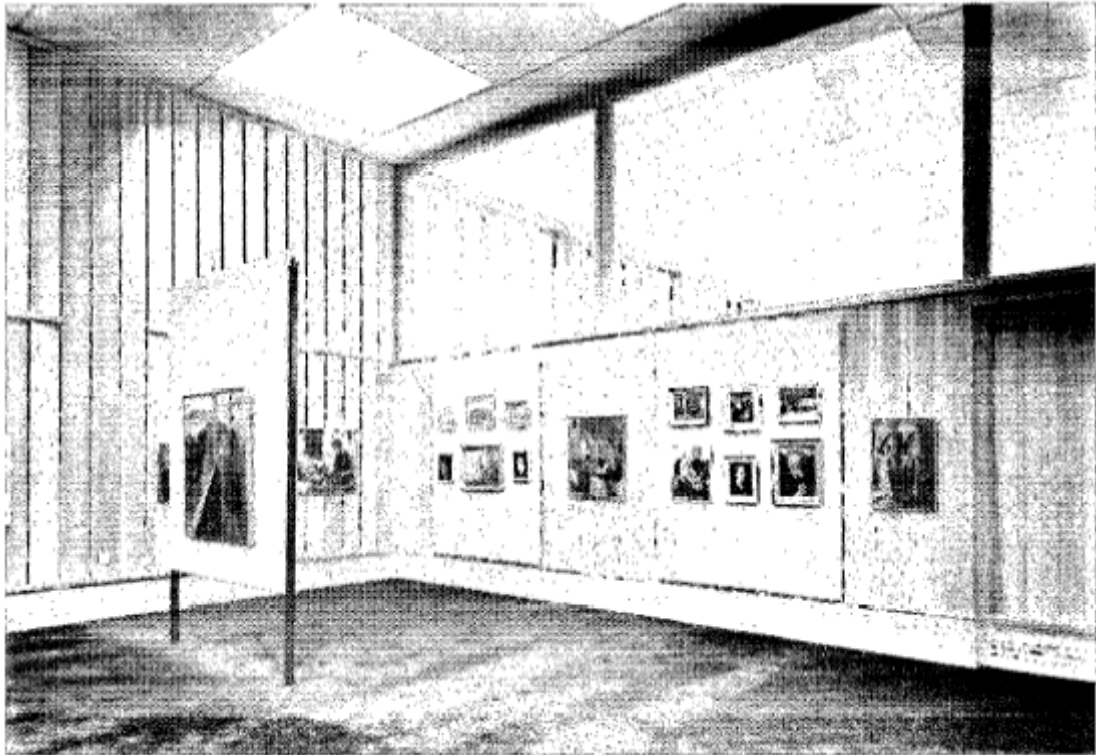


Fig. 3.9 Exhibition of paintings, Munch Museum, Oslo, 1963. The wooden panels extending from floor to ceiling functioned as vertical blinds. *The Scream* hangs on the single partition wall in the foreground.



Fig. 3.10 Exhibition of paintings, Munch Museum, Oslo, 1963. Note the densely packed partition walls.





Fig. 3.11 Munch Museum, Oslo, 22 August 2004. Police cordoned off the museum and began questioning the around 70 staff members and visitors who were inside the museum when the thieves entered shortly after 11am.



Fig. 3.12 Munch Museum, Oslo, 22 August 2004. Police were notified of the robbery at 11:10am.



Fig. 3.13 Munch Museum, Oslo, 22 August 2004. Markita Ogjová from the Czech Republic saw one of the robbers threaten visitors and order them to lie on the floor.

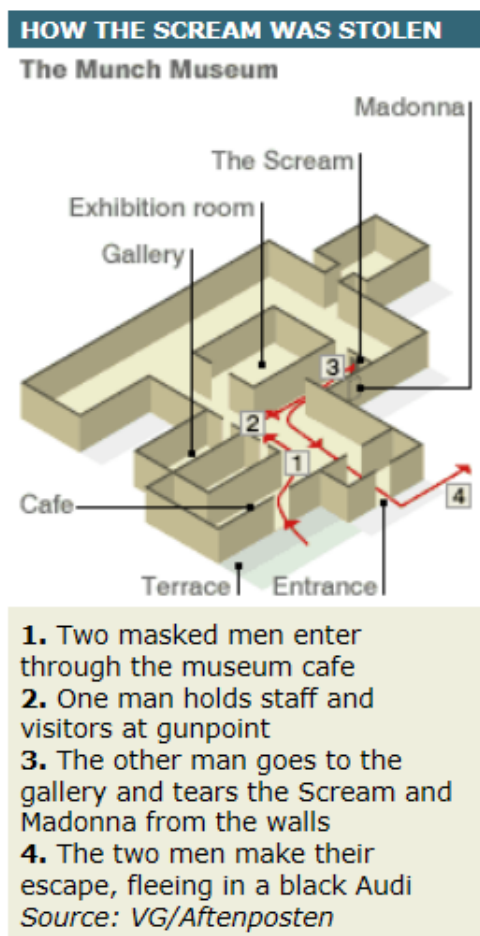


Fig. 3.14 Aftenposten's map of the route taken by thieves during the robbery, reprinted here by BBC News, 'Scream Stolen from Norway Museum'. 22 August 2004. *BBC News*. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/3588282.stm>.



Fig. 3.15 Munch Museum, Oslo, 22 August 2004. Empty space where the *Scream* hung before the theft.



Fig. 3.16 Munch Museum, Oslo, 22 August 2004. Two thieves carrying *The Scream* and *Madonna* to getaway car. The driver of the car can be seen opening the boot for the thieves to load the pictures. Photo taken by an anonymous witness.





Fig. 3.17 Munch Museum, Oslo, 22 August 2004. Thieves loading *The Scream* and *Madonna* into the getaway car. Photo taken by an anonymous witness.



Fig. 3.18 Munch Museum, Oslo, 22 August 2004. The thieves jump in the car and drive off, within 50 seconds of entering the museum. Photo by an anonymous witness.



Fig. 3.19 Police later found the getaway car, a black Audi A6 station wagon, parked on Sinsenveien, near a local tennis club.



Fig. 3.20 Pieces of the frames from *The Scream* and *Madonna* found shortly after the robbery on the Carl Berners Pass, not far from the Munch Museum.



Fig. 3.21 A discarded piece of frame found on Sarsgaten, a street near the Munch Museum.



Fig. 3.22 Munch Museum, Oslo. Posters of the *Munch By Himself* exhibition flank the main entrance. The café is situated to the left of the building. There were no changes to the exterior of the building with the 2005 restructuring.



Fig. 3.23 Installation of baggage scanner at entrance to Munch Museum, 2005.





Fig. 3.24 Director Gunnar Sorensen overseeing the installation of metal detectors at the main entrance to Munch Museum, 2005.



Fig. 3.25 Bar-coded ticket to the Munch Museum (adhesive sticker). Scanning of the ticket is required to open the security doors leading into the exhibition space (below).



Fig. 3.26 Set of remote-locking double security doors leading into the exhibition space, as seen from the main entrance. Munch Museum, Oslo, 2005.



Fig. 3.27 Director Gunnar Sorensen standing on the exhibition side of the set of double security doors. Munch Museum, Oslo, 2005. Note the waist-level locking gates.



Fig. 3.28 Photo of Munch Museum director Gunnar Sorensen and City Art Director Lise Mjøs standing in front of empty panel where *The Scream* hung before the theft.





Fig. 3.29 Exhibition space between 1994 and 2004.



Fig. 3.30 Munch Museum, Oslo, 2005. Exhibition space post 2004. Partition walls have been removed, carpet replaced by parquet flooring, walls have been white-washed, and there are significantly more security cameras. The exit is blocked by the semi-permanent wall ahead. To the right, prints and drawings hang in the dimly lit labyrinth-like corridor that connects to the other side of the museum.



Fig. 3.31 Munch Museum, Oslo, 2005. An example of the floor to ceiling glass walls installed in 2004. The works are set back by approximately two feet. When open, the glass folds into the sides of the walls. All of these paintings are already glazed.



Fig. 3.32 Munch Museum, Oslo, 2005. Installing pictures behind the floor to ceiling glass walls. Note that these pictures are already glazed.



Fig. 3.33 Munch Museum, Oslo, 2005. Bullet-proof glass sheets have been placed over any unglazed or 'portable' sized works. This is the same type of glass (same fastenings) affix found now in the National Gallery, Oslo.



Fig. 3.34 National Gallery, Oslo. The *Madonna* (left) and *Scream* (second from right) hanging before the sheets of protective glass were added in October 2005.

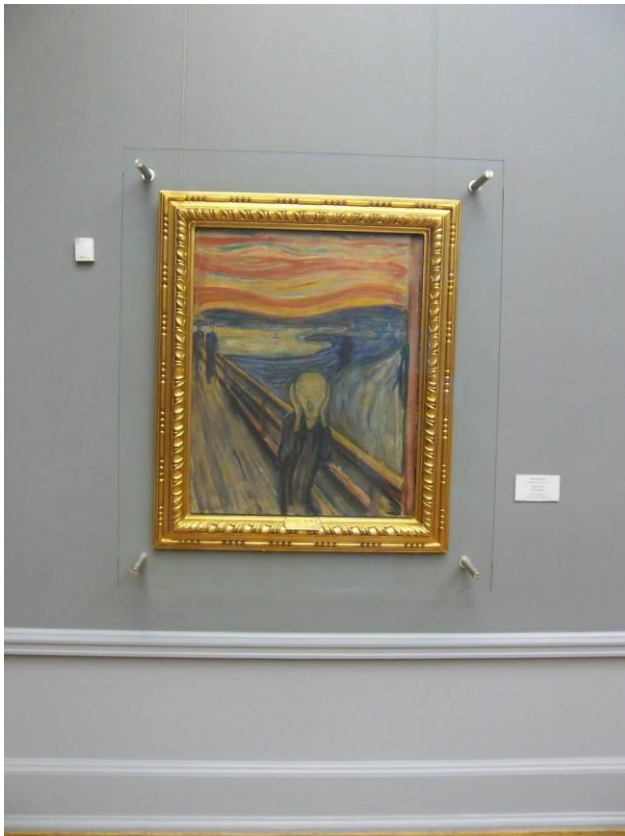


Fig. 3.35 Protective glass over *The Scream*, 1893, National Gallery, Oslo. The painting still hangs by wire (barely visible at the top of the frame). A rope barrier, not visible in the picture, is placed before the painting.



Fig. 3.36 Another view of *The Scream* hanging in the National Gallery, Oslo. No other paintings are glazed (apart from *Madonna*).





Fig. 3.37 Rijksmuseum, Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam. Designed by Benthem Crouwel NACO, completed 2003.



Fig. 3.38 Glass walls at the Rijksmuseum, Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam.



Fig. 3.39 The Thomson ivories at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto in 2009. The ivories were stolen from a wooden display case on 17 January 2004, recovered two weeks later, and reintegrated into the current display behind floor-to-ceiling glass walls.

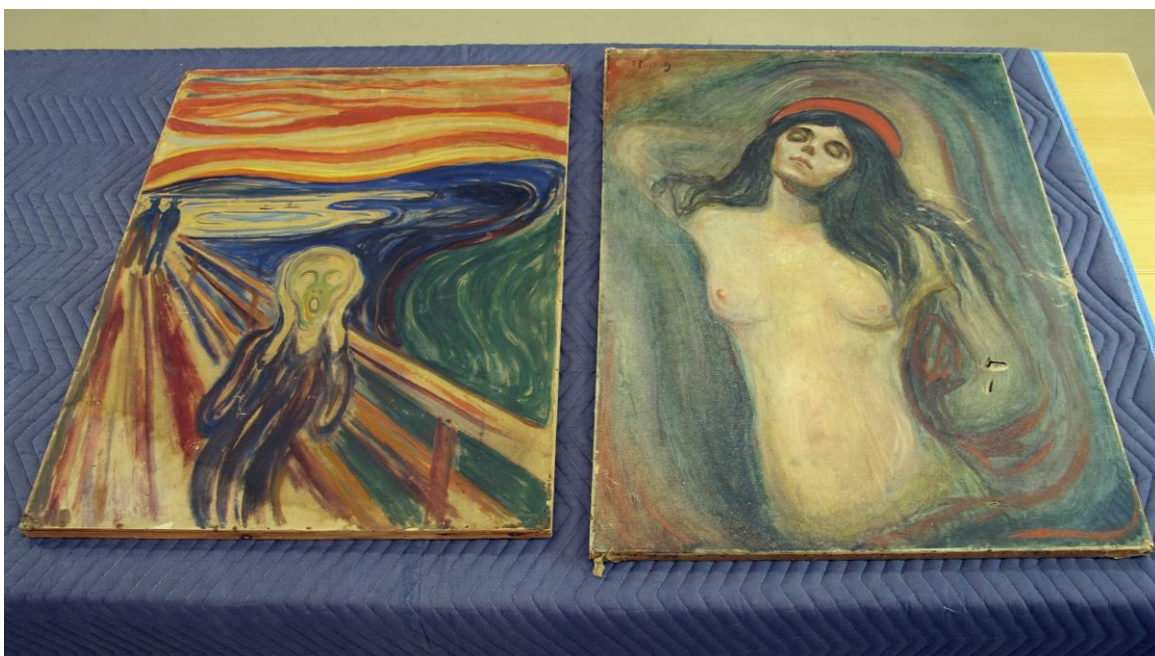


Fig. 3.40 Image released by the Munch Museum of *The Scream* and *Madonna* following their recovery on 31 August 2006. The discolouration from a water stain is evident on *The Scream* (bottom left corner) as well as the two punctures and scratches and paint loss to the middle right edge of the *Madonna*.





Fig. 3.41 Image released by the Munch Museum of the damage to a corner of *The Scream*.



Fig. 3.42 Image released by the Munch Museum of the damage caused by a puncture to the canvas of *Madonna*.



Fig. 3.43 *The Scream* and *Madonna* on display in their damaged state, 27 September to 1 October 2006, Munch Museum, Oslo.



Fig. 3.44 *The Scream* and *Madonna* on display in their damaged state, 27 September to 1 October 2006, Munch Museum, Oslo. Associated works line the rear wall including a pastel version of *The Scream* (far left) and the lithograph that hung in its absence after it was stolen (far right). The track for the floor-to-ceiling glass walls (retracted here) can be seen below the line of paintings.





Fig. 3.45 *The Scream* and *Madonna* on display in their damaged state, 27 September to 1 October 2006, Munch Museum, Oslo. Lithographs associated with the *Madonna* line the rear wall.



Fig. 3.46 Long queues throughout the five-day exhibition of the newly recovered paintings from 27 September to 1 October 2006. Munch Museum, Oslo.



Fig. 3.47 *The Scream* post-conservation. Note the diagonal mark of the water damage to the bottom left of the painting. Lights reflected in the bulletproof display case appear at top.



Fig. 3.48 A group of schoolchildren viewing *The Scream* after it was reinstalled behind one of the bulletproof glass walls in 2008. A matching glass wall can be seen in the background. Photo: Corrado Bonora.

**Chapter 4: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston**

Fig. 4.1 Johannes Vermeer, *The Concert*, 1658-1660, oil on canvas, 72.5 x 64.7 cm. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.



Fig. 4.2 Rembrandt van Rijn, *A Lady and Gentleman in Black*, 1633, oil on canvas, 131.6 x 109 cm. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.





Fig. 4.3 Rembrandt van Rijn's *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee*, 1633, oil on canvas, 161.7 x 129.8 cm. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.



Fig. 4.4 Rembrandt van Rijn, *Self-Portrait*, c.1634, etching, 1 3/4 x 2 in. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.



Fig. 4.5 Édouard Manet's *Chez Tortoni*, 1878-1880, oil on canvas, 26 x 34 cm. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.



Fig. 4.6 Govaert Flinck's *Landscape with an Obelisk*, 1638, oil on oak panel, 54.5 x 71 cm. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.



Fig. 4.7 Edgar Degas, *La Sortie du Pesage*, pencil and gouache on paper, 10 x 16 cm. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.



Fig. 4.8 Edgar Degas, *Three Mounted Jockeys*, Black ink, white, flesh and rose washes, probably oil pigments, applied with a brush on medium brown paper, 30.5 x 24 cm. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.



Fig. 4.9 Edgar Degas, *Cortège aux Environs de Florence*, pencil and gouache on paper, 16 x 21 cm. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.

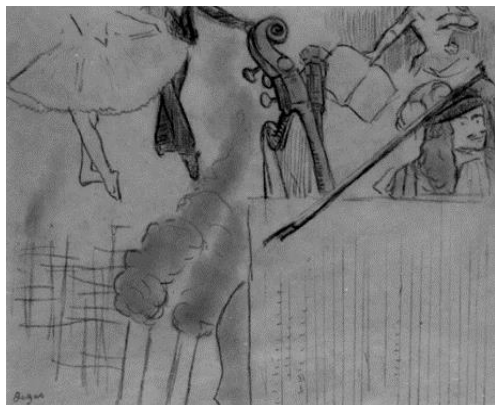


Fig. 4.10 Edgar Degas, *Program for an artistic soiree*, 1884, charcoal on white paper, 24.1 x 30.9 cm. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.



Fig. 4.11 Edgar Degas, *Program for an artistic soiree*, 1884, a lesser-finished version of the above, charcoal on buff paper, 23.4 x 30 cm. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.



Fig. 4.12 Chinese beaker or *Ku*, China, Shang Dynasty, 1200-1100BC, bronze, H. 10 1/2 in. Diam. 6 1/8 in. Wt. 2 lbs. 7 oz. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.





Fig. 4.13 Finial in the form of an eagle, gilt metal (bronze), French, 1813–1814, approximately 10 inches high. Stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum on 18 March 1990; unrecovered.



Fig. 4.14 The Dutch Room at the Gardner Museum post theft. The table to the right contained Vermeer's *The Concert* (facing) and Flinck's *Landscape with an Obelisk* (reverse). The empty frames in the background contained Rembrandt's *A Lady and Gentleman in Black* ( left) and *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee* ( right). The Chinese *Ku* was taken from the table below Francisco de Zurbarán's *A Doctor of Law*, c.1635 (rear centre).





Fig. 4.15 The 'Black Room', 1855-57, inspired by the Early Renaissance at the Museo Poldi Pezzoli, Milan.



Fig. 4.16 Fenway Court, May 1920. The Museum of Fine Arts, Boston is visible in the background. Photo: Courtesy of Boston Public Library.



Fig. 4.17 The Titian Room, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Titian's *Rape of Europa*, c. 1560-62, hangs on the back wall. The scalloped border transferred from her old home can be seen at the top of the photograph. A small portrait, Circle of Giovanni Bellini, *Christ Carrying the Cross*, c.1505-10 sits on a table in the foreground. Gardner's tradition of placing fresh violets in a silver vase on the table is continued by the museum.



Fig. 4.18 Entrance to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. Portal contains the figures of St. George and St. Florian, patron saints protecting against theft and fire.



Fig. 4.19 The interior courtyard of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, a Venetian palace-façade turned inwards upon itself. Director Anne Hawley stands in the foreground with a visitor.



Fig. 4.20 The exterior façade of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.





Fig. 4.21 The interior staircase of the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum where a mixture of natural and subtle artificial lights illuminates the corridors.

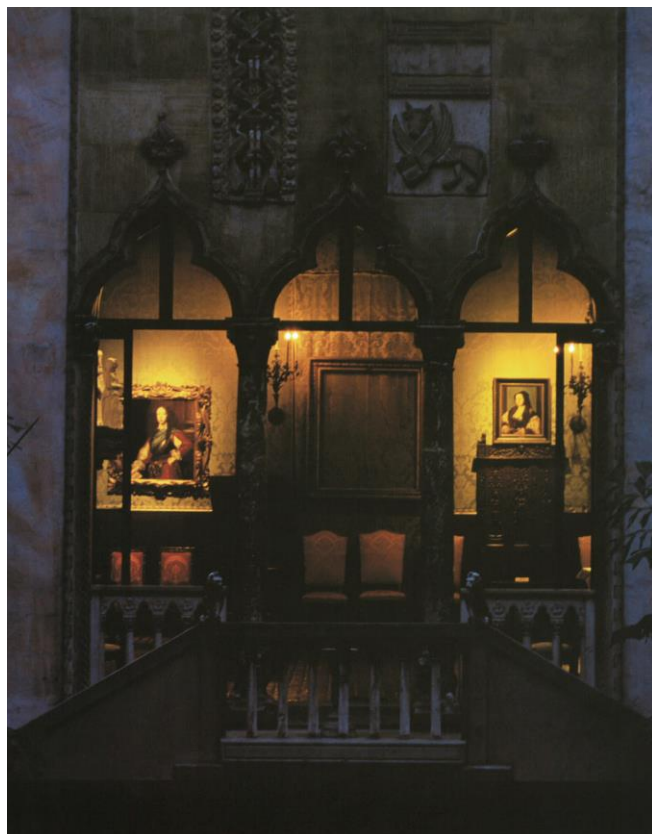


Fig. 4.22 The Dutch Room, viewed from across the courtyard, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. The rooms rely heavily on natural lighting.

# Anatomy of a heist

On March 18, 1990, the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum was robbed of 13 valuable works of art by two thieves dressed as police officers.

## Minute by minute:

Reconstruction based on alarm times and eyewitness accounts.

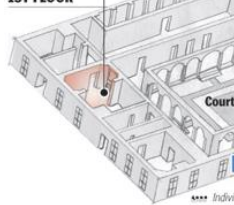


"Chez Tortoni," by Edouard Manet

### BLUE ROOM

One item stolen:  
■ Manet, "Chez Tortoni," oil on canvas

### 1ST FLOOR



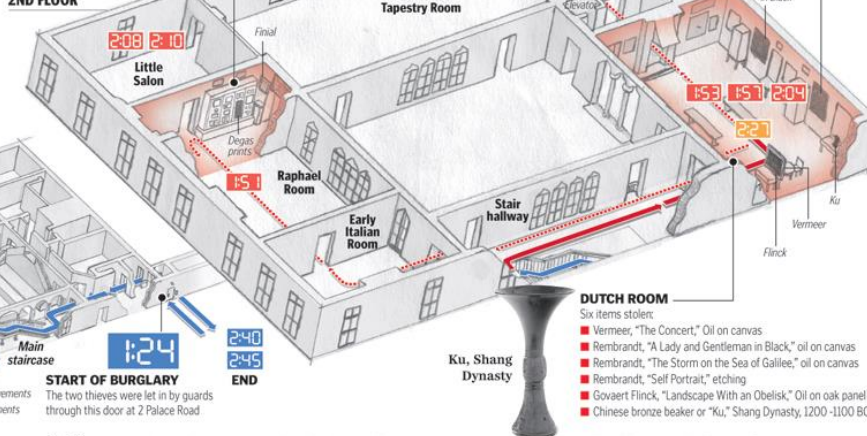
"La Sortie du Pelage" by Degas

### SHORT GALLERY

Six items stolen:

- Degas, "La Sortie du Pelage," pencil and water color on paper
- Degas, "Cortège Aux Environs de Florence," pencil, wash on paper
- Degas, "Three Mounted Jockeys," black ink, washes, oil on paper
- Degas, "Program for an Artistic Soiree," charcoal on paper
- Degas, "Program for an Artistic Soiree," unfinished, charcoal on paper
- Gilded finial atop a Napoleonic banner

### 2ND FLOOR



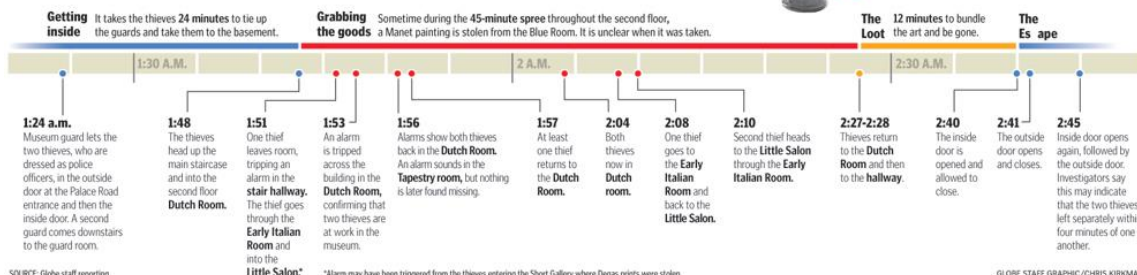
"The Concert" by Vermeer

"The Storm on the Sea of Galilee," by Rembrandt

### DUTCH ROOM

Six items stolen:

- Vermeer, "The Concert," oil on canvas
- Rembrandt, "A Lady and Gentleman in Black," oil on canvas
- Rembrandt, "The Storm on the Sea of Galilee," oil on canvas
- Rembrandt, "Self Portrait," etching
- Govaert Flinck, "Landscape With an Obelisk," oil on oak panel
- Chinese bronze beaker or "Ku," Shang Dynasty, 1200-1100 BC



SOURCE: Globe staff reporting

\*Alarm may have been triggered from the thieves entering the Short Gallery where Degas prints were stolen.

GLOBE STAFF GRAPHIC/CHRIS KIRKMAN

Fig. 4.23 Reconstruction of the theft based on alarm times and eye witness accounts published by *The Boston Globe*.

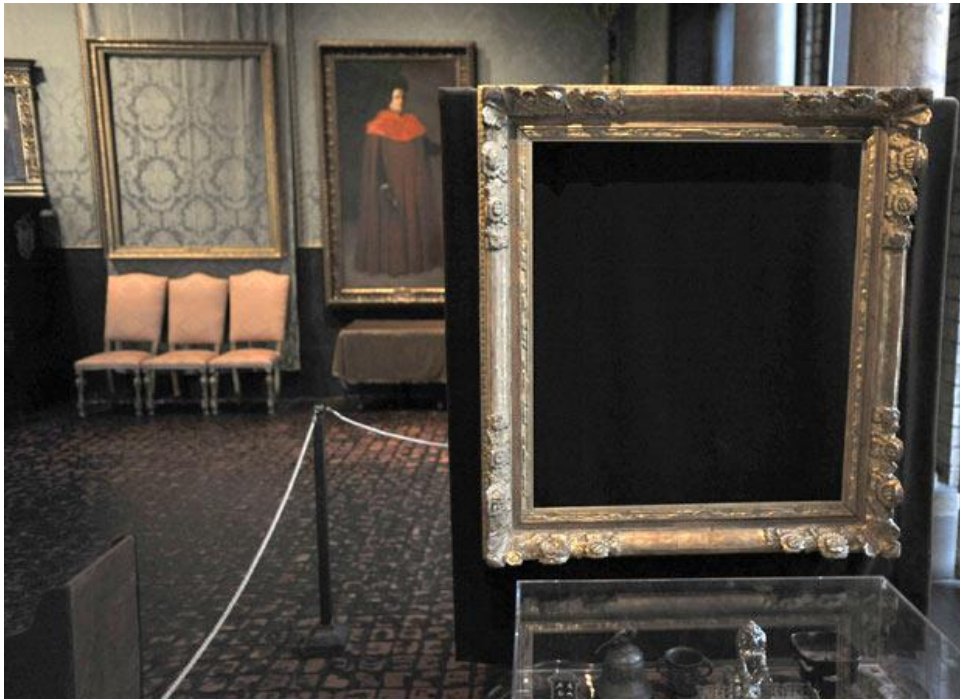


Fig. 4.24 Empty frame (foreground) from which Vermeer's *The Concert* was taken during the theft.



Fig. 4.25 Empty frame from which Flinck's *Landscape with an Obelisk* was taken during the theft. The Rembrandt *Self-Portrait, Aged 23*, 1629, hanging to the left of the window was removed from the wall but left behind by the thieves.





Fig. 4.26 Empty spaces where Rembrandt's *A Lady and Gentleman in Black* (left) and *The Storm on the Sea of Galilee* (right) hung when they were cut from their frames on 18 March 1990.



Fig. 4.27 Museum attendant at the door to the Dutch Room following the theft. The empty space on the back wall is where shows where Rembrandt's *A Lady and Gentleman in Black* hung. At this time the frames had been removed for forensic examination.

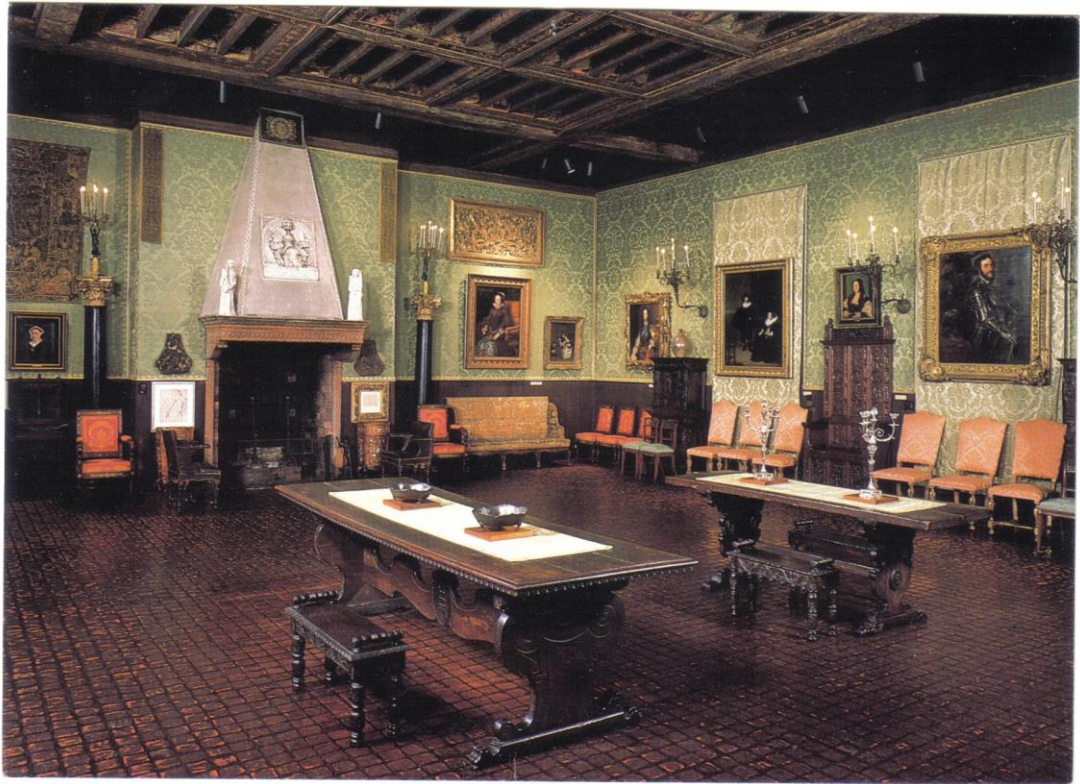


Fig. 4.28 The Dutch Room before the theft, with Rembrandt's *A Lady and Gentleman in Black* hanging *in situ*.



Fig. 4.29 The label inside the frame of each missing Rembrandt notes the artist, title and date, followed by, 'Stolen on March 18, 1990'.



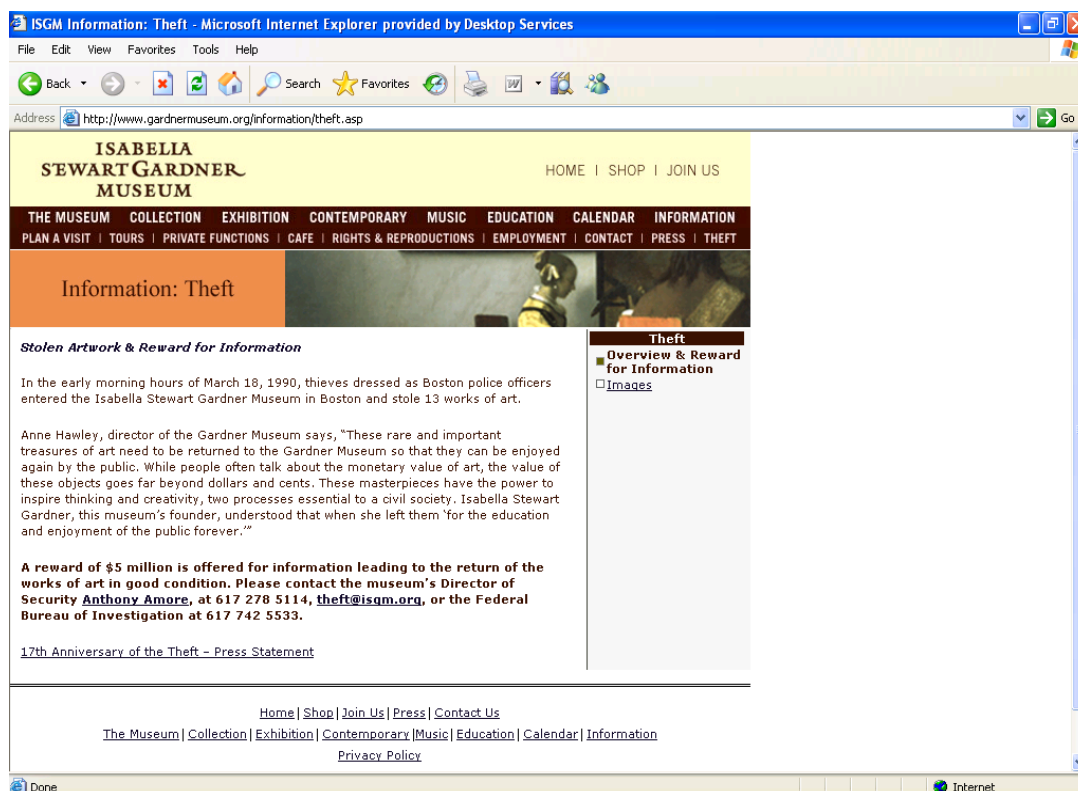


Fig. 4.30 Screen-shot of the old version of the website. Theft 'tab' is located on the far right of the burgundy menu, which also appeared on the home page.

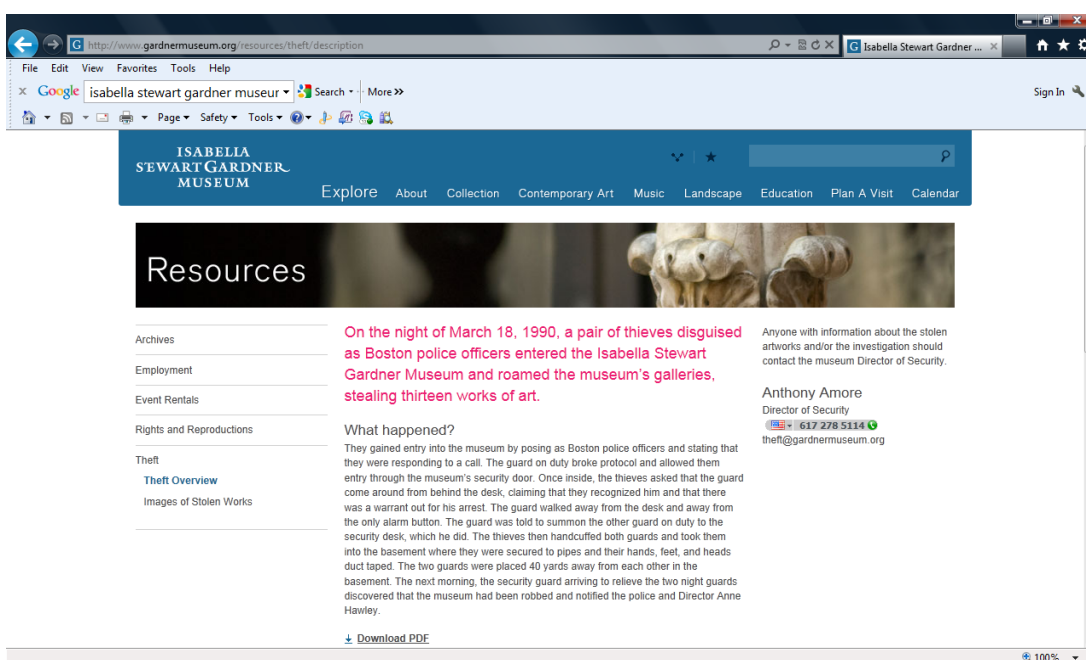


Fig. 4.31 Screen-shot of the new website. Information on the theft is accessed by clicking through a few more layers: 'About', then 'Archives', then selecting 'Theft'.



Fig. 4.32 The glass-enclosed walkway connecting the historic building (left) to the new extension. Trees have been planted to echo the original entrance and the feeling of being outdoors.



Fig. 4.33 Rendering of the new extension to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. The original palace is situated to the right. Renzo Piano Building Workshop, 2010.



Fig. 4.34 Elevation from Evans Way Park. Extension to the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. The original palace is situated to the right. Renzo Piano Building Workshop, 2010.



## Appendix 1

### Databases of Stolen Objects

#### The Art Loss Register

<http://www.artloss.com/>

Established in 1991, The ALR is a London-based, independent corporate off-spring of the New York-based, non-profit International Foundation for Art Research (IFAR).

This site provides an evolving database of stolen and missing works of art, antiques, and valuables. Its main objectives are to increase recoveries and deter theft as well as reducing the trade in stolen art.

#### Crime & Intelligence Digest, Council for the Prevention of Art Theft (CoPAT).

CoPAT carries reports of art and antique thefts, attempted thefts and sightings of suspicious persons. It is circulated on a confidential basis to police and heritage organisations throughout the UK. CoPAT encourages crime prevention measures such as the use of security systems, object marking, and is the home of *Object ID* - the international standard for describing art, antiques, and antiquities.

#### IFAR Reports/Index of Stolen Art, New York. International Foundation for Art Research

This newsletter is published ten times per year. It covers articles on art theft, authentication and fraud, as well as containing a stolen art alert. It also provides a catalogue of art theft reports and recovery listings. It was formed by the merger of *Art Research News* and the *Stolen Art Alert*. It supersedes the *Art Theft Archive Newsletter*.

#### London Stolen Arts Database (LSAD), Metropolitan Police Art and Antiquities Unit

<http://www.met.police.uk/artandantiques/>

The database currently stores details and images of 54,000 items of stolen property.

#### Museum Security Network

<http://museum-security.org/>

An index of all aspects of security and safety for cultural property protection professionals. Founded by Ton Cremers, former head of security the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, the MSN has been on-line since December 1996.

#### National Stolen Art File (NSAF), Federal Bureau of Investigation

<http://www.fbi.gov/>

The FBI created the Art Theft Program in 2004. This site indexes stolen art and cultural property that has been reported to the FBI by law enforcement agencies around the world. It provides images and physical descriptions of

the missing items. The site serves two purposes: to aid in the investigation of the theft and to provide a source for analyzing art theft.

**Object ID**

<http://www.object-id.com/>

Originally started by the J. Paul Getty Foundation in 1993, Object ID is now continued by the **Council for the Prevention of Art Theft (CoPAT)**. Object ID provides an international standard for describing cultural artworks/items. This standard has been adopted by museums law enforcement agencies worldwide.

**Stolen Art Directory**

<http://www.saztv.com/>

This site provides information on stolen art and its recovery. It was created as an adjunct to a television show produced on the subject.

**Stolen Works of Art, INTERPOL**

<http://www.interpol.int/Crime-areas/Works-of-art/Works-of-art>

International notices on stolen art have been published by INTERPOL since 1947. It provides information on recent thefts and discoveries and publishes a list of *Stolen Works of Art*.